

THE PRAYER OF THE HEART AS A KEY METAPHOR  
FOR UNDERSTANDING THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION  
OF THE PASTORAL COUNSELING PROCESS

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by  
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## ABSTRACT

# The Prayer of the Heart as a Key Metaphor for Understanding the Spiritual Dimension of the Pastoral Counseling Process

by

Penelope J. Matthews

The dual nature of the contemporary pastoral counseling movement presents a significant challenge to the field today. On the one hand, pastoral counseling has its roots in the ancient tradition of the cure of souls. On the other hand, it is a thoroughly modern discipline, utilizing psychological theories and methods in the practice of ministry. One of the strengths of pastoral counseling is its commitment to the task of integrating insights from psychology and psychotherapy into a theological framework. However, in recent years critics have charged that the psychological pole has come to dominate the field and that the theological pole has been neglected.

While affirming the contribution of modern psychology and psychotherapy to pastoral counseling, this study emphasizes a theological understanding of the pastoral counseling process. The primary source for this understanding is the prayer of the heart, an ancient tradition of inner prayer. The study also draws upon selected sources from contemporary depth psychology.

The thesis of this study is that the prayer of the heart is a metaphor for the deepening movement of grace within the person and that this dynamic forms the spiritual



core of the pastoral counseling process. It provides a framework for viewing pastoral counseling as a process of spiritual formation.

Chapter 1 includes a statement of the problem and the methodology employed in the study. Chapter 2 includes an overview of the tradition of the prayer of the heart and a discussion of the primary text. Chapter 3 is a presentation of the central theological elements of the prayer of the heart. Chapter 4 develops an understanding of the pastoral counseling process as deepening in grace, drawing upon the tradition of the prayer of the heart and insights from contemporary depth psychology. Chapter 5 presents conclusions reached in the study.

The findings of the study suggest that the prayer of the heart has much to offer the field of pastoral counseling. As a metaphor for the deepening movement of grace, the prayer of the heart provides one way of understanding the spiritual core of the pastoral counseling process. As a method of deepening human experience, it suggests a way of understanding pastoral counseling as a process of spiritual formation.

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**In Memory of Joyce B. Matthews**  
**(1918-1990)**

CHAPTER 1  
The Pastoral Counseling Process  
as Spiritual Formation

The interdisciplinary character of contemporary pastoral counseling has become increasingly problematic in recent years. Pastoral counseling has come under fire for allowing modern psychology and psychotherapy to dominate the field while it has neglected its theological foundations and historical roots. Some argue that pastoral counseling simply reflects a general psychologizing trend in the culture. One of the consequences of this shift is that modern psychology and psychotherapy have taken over some of the functions once filled by traditional religion, including the function of spiritual guidance. At the same time, this society is experiencing a renewed interest in spirituality, both within the churches and without, which has important implications for the field of pastoral counseling.

The goal of this study is to address the problem of the dominance of the psychological pole in pastoral counseling by turning to the tradition of Christian spirituality as a source for understanding the theological core of the pastoral counseling process. The intention is not in any way to discount the importance of the contribution of modern psychology and psychotherapy to the field. Rather, the aim is to seek a uniquely theological definition of pastoral counseling.

It will be argued here that one way of understanding

the theological dimension of pastoral counseling is to see it as a process of spiritual formation. The core of this process is the deepening movement of grace within the person. The primary source for understanding what is meant by the deepening movement of grace is the Christian tradition of prayer and spirituality, more particularly the tradition of the prayer of the heart.

The prayer of the heart is an ancient method of inner or contemplative prayer dating back to the fourth century and still being practiced today. The thesis of this study is that the prayer of the heart is a metaphor for the deepening movement of grace, and that studying this method of prayer in depth will shed light on this dynamic.

The study will include a summary of the development of the tradition of the prayer of the heart, a description of its central theological elements, and applications of this model of spiritual formation to the pastoral counseling process. Some modifications to the model will also be introduced. Insights from modern depth psychology will be integrated into the understanding of the pastoral counseling process. It will be argued that modern depth psychology is particularly compatible with the prayer of the heart, since both contain methods for deepening human experience. In some respects, modern depth psychology complements and serves as a corrective to the understanding of the human found in the prayer of the heart. Clinical illustrations will be included in order to demonstrate how the model of



the prayer of the heart can inform the actual process of pastoral counseling.

The following is a brief overview of the study.

Chapter 1 lays out the statement of the problem and the methodology to be followed in the study. In the way of an introduction to the statement of the problem, the first section is a brief summary of the origins of present day pastoral counseling. The second section focuses on a critique of the contemporary pastoral counseling movement in regard to the dominance of the psychological pole and the neglect of the theological pole in the field. The third section locates this study in relation to the positions represented in the second section. The fourth section includes a statement of the thesis, the goals of the study, the principal sources to be employed, and a definition of terms.

Chapter 2 addresses the question, What is the prayer of the heart, and what is its significance? An overview of the evolution of the prayer of the heart will be presented, highlighting some of the major stages in its development. Lastly, there will be a brief discussion of the rationale underlying the selection of the primary source.

Chapter 3 is a discussion of the main components of this method of prayer. These elements will be explored in depth, relying upon the primary source. The intention is to convey an understanding of the central theological elements of the prayer of the heart, as well as a sense of the

overall movement of the prayer.

Chapter 4 develops the thesis that the prayer of the heart forms the spiritual core of the pastoral counseling process. The first section is a discussion of the heart as the dimension of depth in human experience and the implications of this for the pastoral counseling process. The second section explores the theme of the inward journey to the heart. The third section focuses on mind-in-heart prayer as a method of integration. The fourth section presents some conclusions with regard to a theological container for the pastoral counseling process. Clinical material is included to illustrate how this understanding of the pastoral counseling process actually functions in the clinical setting.

Finally, Chapter 5 is a summary of the findings of the study. Limitations of the model will be suggested as well as areas for further study. Implications of this understanding of the pastoral counseling process will be discussed.

#### The Historical Context of Present Day Pastoral Counseling

The contemporary pastoral counseling movement has its roots in the ancient tradition of the cure of souls. In his classic text, *A History of the Cure of Souls*, John T. McNeill defines the cure of souls as "the sustaining and curative treatment of persons in those matters that reach

beyond the requirements of the animal life."<sup>1</sup> He describes the soul as "the essence of human personality."<sup>2</sup> The goal of the cure of souls is, thus, "health of personality."<sup>3</sup>

Pastoral care and counseling is also a thoroughly modern discipline, incorporating insights from psychology and psychotherapy into a theological framework. Various authors have commented on the impact of modern psychology and psychotherapy on the field of pastoral counseling. Some are more negative in their assessments; others offer a more positive evaluation. In order to better understand some of the key issues involved in this discussion, it will be helpful to examine some of the antecedents of present day pastoral counseling.

The contemporary pastoral care and counseling movement is a development of the liberal tradition in American Protestantism.<sup>4</sup> Modern science, especially the theory of evolution and the historicity of the Bible, had a major impact on Protestant theology towards the end of the

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<sup>1</sup> John T. McNeill, *A History of the Cure of Souls* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), vii.

<sup>2</sup> McNeill, vii.

<sup>3</sup> McNeill, vii.

<sup>4</sup> For more on this theme, see Allison Stokes, *Ministry After Freud* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1985). In this volume Stokes examines the impact of Freud's thought on Protestant ministry in America. Her focus is the Religion and Health Movement, the forerunner of contemporary pastoral counseling. Stokes argues that the Religion and Health Movement is an expression of the liberal tradition in American Protestantism. It originated in the application of scientific psychotherapy to the ministry of soul cure.

nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. One of the hallmarks of liberal theology was the accommodation of modern science and scholarship. Contemporary pastoral care and counseling can trace its roots back to this liberal or modernist impulse. A commitment to the integration of psychology and theology lies at the core of the contemporary pastoral counseling movement.

The first serious effort to integrate the new psychology into the cure of souls found expression in the Emmanuel Movement shortly after the turn of this century.<sup>5</sup> Doctors and ministers worked together to promote Christ's healing ministry. The significance of the movement lies in its adoption of scientific psychotherapy as a means of soul cure. However, even then critics charged that religion was being held captive to culture and that theology was being confused with psychotherapy. Clergy were accused of

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<sup>5</sup> Stokes observes that the Emmanuel Movement arose in response to dissatisfaction with the Social Gospel which was perceived by some as not sufficiently personal or spiritual. Many at that time experienced religion as irrelevant to daily life. A new wave of spontaneous spirituality was sweeping the country; new cults and sects were springing up everywhere. It is intriguing to note that, in this respect, the religious situation at that time bears a certain resemblance to the situation in this country today.

While Stokes acknowledges that the Religion and Health Movement began in tension with the Social Gospel, she argues that they are complementary and parallel movements. The Social Gospel represented primarily Jesus' social and prophetic ministry, while the Religion and Health movement emphasized Jesus' healing and priestly ministry. This inherent tension between the two movements may account for some of the on-going competition between these strands in contemporary pastoral counseling.

overstepping their religious roles and imitating psychotherapists.

Following World War I the climate of the country embodied the growing influence of psychology and psychotherapy on the culture--what some have termed a cultural conversion to psychology. Developments in the field of pastoral care and counseling reflected this cultural trend.

The impetus underlying the growth of the pastoral counseling movement continued to be the attempt to reconcile modern psychology and psychotherapy with the Christian faith in the application of scientific methods to the ministry of soul cure. One of the central assumptions underlying the movement was the lawfulness of human behavior and motivation which was predicated upon the validity of the scientific method. Pioneers in the field took the scientific validity of modern psychology and psychotherapy for granted.

Within the churches there was a growing need for competence in pastoral care and counseling. With the rise of modern psychology and psychotherapy ministry was threatened with becoming irrelevant or obsolete as far as helping people cope with problems of daily life in an increasingly secular world. Modern psychology and psychotherapy provided the needed tools.

In response to the growing interest in psychology and psychotherapy in American society, pastoral theologians engaged in an effort to build bridges between psychology and

theology.<sup>6</sup> A topic that became the subject of much debate was, what is the difference between pastoral counseling and psychotherapy? Then, as now, critics charged that the methods proposed by so-called pastoral psychotherapists were often indistinguishable from secular psychotherapy. The question was asked, What is distinctive about pastoral counseling?

In the years following World War II pastoral theologians set about to define the relationship between theology and psychotherapy. Some of the same themes raised by these pioneers in pastoral counseling are echoed in the literature today, as will be seen. One of the central questions asked was, what is the difference--if, indeed, there is a difference--between the psychiatric goal of mental health and the theological goal of spiritual growth? This question gets at the key relationship between psychological wholeness and salvation.

Many attempts were made to arrive at a synthesis between theology and psychotherapeutic theory. Theological concepts and psychological concepts were held to be correlative. However, the problem with the method of correlation was that it was used by a number of pastoral

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6 For more on this theme, see E. Brooks Holifield, *A History of Pastoral Care in America: From Salvation to Self-Realization* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983). Holifield's interpretation of the historical context of contemporary pastoral care and counseling provides an illuminating perspective from which to view more recent discussions in the field.

theologians in differing ways with conflicting results. While some proposed that psychotherapy should deepen theology, others argued that theology should deepen psychotherapy.

During this period the focus continued to be on the dialogue between psychology and theology. While various methodologies--from Tillich's method of correlation to the analogical method employed by process theologians--were being developed, the fundamental orientation of the field remained a commitment to the task of integration.

However, even then there were a few pastoral theologians questioning this preoccupation with modern psychology and psychotherapy. Rather than focusing on the ways in which psychology could enrich theology, they stressed the need for theology to check and limit the uncritical assumptions of secular psychotherapy. These pastoral theologians challenged the implicit worldviews underlying psychotherapeutic faiths. The argument was made that the Christian tradition provides a more adequate worldview for psychotherapy than a strictly secular perspective. It was suggested that theology could affect the process of psychotherapy itself. Warning against seeking a borrowed identity from secular psychotherapy, they argued that pastoral counselors should, instead, turn to traditional religious language and imagery as a source for pastoral counseling. Some even went so far as to question whether pastoral theology had gone the wrong direction in

focusing primarily on the integration of theology and psychology.<sup>7</sup>

E. Brooks Holifield concludes that the interest in the correlation between theology and psychology has often led pastoral theologians to allow psychological language to overwhelm or define the religious tradition. He argues:

Pastoral theologians have ample access to the language of both worlds. They are better served when they live in both, letting each check the imperialistic tendencies of the other, than when they smooth out the differences or assume that religious and psychological concepts merely designate the same reality with different words.<sup>8</sup>

Protestant clergy have benefited from the new sensitivity to pastoral counseling. The problem has been that preoccupation with psychological models has refashioned "the entire religious life of Protestants in the image of the therapeutic."<sup>9</sup>

In summary, the contemporary pastoral counseling movement has a dual nature. On the one hand, it represents the ancient tradition of the cure of souls within the Christian church. On the other hand, it is firmly rooted in this century, integrating insights from modern psychology and psychotherapy into a theological framework. Contemporary pastoral counseling is a peculiarly American phenomenon, although its influence has spread throughout the

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<sup>7</sup> See Holifield, 324-42.

<sup>8</sup> Holifield, 355.

<sup>9</sup> Holifield, 356.



world. It is an expression of the liberal tradition in American Protestantism. Contemporary pastoral counseling can trace its birth back to the marriage of modern scientific methods, namely, scientific psychology and psychotherapy, with the traditionally religious function of soul cure. This belief in the positive contribution of modern psychology and psychotherapy to ministry has been one of the most important developments in pastoral care this century.

At the core of contemporary pastoral care and counseling lies the commitment to the integration of modern psychology and psychotherapy into a theological framework. Throughout the early days of the movement considerable energy was expended in the task of correlating psychological concepts with theological concepts. However, even at the height of interest in correlation, a few pastoral theologians were more cautious, voicing their concerns that theology was being overshadowed by psychotherapy and that the uniqueness of the Christian perspective being lost.

More recently, critics have charged that the psychological pole has dominated the field of pastoral counseling, that the theological pole has been neglected, that pastoral counseling is cut off from its historical roots, and that it has ignored the spiritual dimension of human experience. The following section will examine some of the key facets of this critique, along with various proposed solutions to the problem.

### The Dominance of the Psychological Pole in Contemporary Pastoral Counseling

This section will focus on four main aspects of the problem. Each sub-section lifts up key issues for consideration. The first sub-section deals with the impact of modern psychology and psychotherapy on the culture as a whole. The second sub-section takes up the theme of the neglect of the theological pole in pastoral counseling. The third sub-section steps outside the field of pastoral care and counseling to consider the problem from the perspective of the sister discipline of spiritual direction. Finally, the fourth sub-section focuses on the spiritual dimension of human experience in pastoral care and counseling.

### The Role of the Modern Psychologies in Contemporary Pastoral Counseling

The common thread running through each of the following critiques of the contemporary pastoral counseling movement is the extent to which modern psychology and psychotherapy have dominated the field in recent times. In order to understand how this has come about, it will be helpful to look at the cultural context within which pastoral counseling has evolved.

Linking developments in the field to general trends in American society, Charles V. Gerkin observes that the contemporary pastoral counseling movement "surfaced in the 1940s and 1950s as a major adaptation of the American church

to the twentieth-century cultural situation."<sup>10</sup> Commenting on shifts in cultural paradigms in the West, Gerkin argues that one of the most significant of these changes for the field of pastoral care and counseling is that the therapeutic paradigm has assumed prominence over other language paradigms. Human experience in America has been psychologized.

One of the pastoral theologians who has been most concerned with assessing the impact of modern psychology and psychotherapy on contemporary society, including the institutional church and the field of pastoral counseling, is Don S. Browning. One of the major themes Browning addresses throughout his writings is the cultural power of psychological ideas. He argues that secular psychotherapies have evolved into much more than scientific theories. They have become major cultural forces and, in some instances, competitors with established religions.<sup>11</sup> According to Browning, secular psychotherapies have become cultures in that they offer "highly generalized interpretations about the purpose of life, the origin of human difficulties, and the secret for human change and betterment."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Charles V. Gerkin, *The Living Human Document: Re-Visioning Pastoral Counseling in a Hermeneutical Mode* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 11.

<sup>11</sup> For more on this theme, see Don S. Browning, *The Moral Context of Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 13.

<sup>12</sup> Browning, *Moral Context of Pastoral Care*, 13.

Browning's position reflects the liberal Protestant origins of the contemporary pastoral counseling movement. He observes that modern science and theology should not conflict logically. Hence, psychology can only conflict with theology when it ceases to be strictly scientific and begins to cross over the line into the realm of religion and ethics. He argues that this is, in fact, what has happened.

Browning observes that the modern psychologies are not the neutral or value-free sciences they are purported to be. Rather, they are cultures in and of themselves. He defines culture as "a set of symbols, stories (myths), and norms for conduct that orient a society or group cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally to the world in which it lives."<sup>13</sup> The modern psychologies contain implicit worldviews and ethics within their conceptual systems. They are frameworks of meaning which help people interpret their experience. They contain normative visions of the good life, what Browning refers to as deep metaphors of ultimacy and principles of obligation.<sup>14</sup> Thus, to the extent that the modern psychologies offer answers to the existential dilemmas of contemporary life, they function as alternative faiths.

Browning takes the modern psychologies seriously as

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<sup>13</sup> Browning, Moral Context of Pastoral Care, 73.

<sup>14</sup> See Don S. Browning, *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies: A Critical Conversation in the Theology of Culture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), ix.

independent sources of culture. The issue is not their therapeutic effectiveness. This can be determined empirically. Rather, he is concerned about the general lack of awareness with regard to the religious and moral dimensions of the modern psychologies. Browning's intention is not to do away with the implicit cultures found in the modern psychologies. Instead, his goal is to help them become more self-critical.

Browning argues that if, in fact, the modern psychologies have become cultures, they are open to philosophical analysis and critique. With this end in mind, he suggests a series of "mutually critical" conversations between theology and the modern psychologies.<sup>15</sup> Browning proposes a method for his project, what he terms "the revised critical correlational approach to the theology of culture."<sup>16</sup> The philosophical task is to uncover and evaluate the ethical and metaphysical horizons of the modern psychologies. His stated goal is to critique the implicit cultures found in selected modern psychologies from another source of culture, the Judeo-Christian tradition. Browning argues that the manner in which deep metaphors function in the modern psychologies and in religion puts them on an equal footing. The assumptions underlying their conceptual

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<sup>15</sup> Browning, *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies*, 16.

<sup>16</sup> Browning, *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies*, 15.

systems have the logical status of faith. The role of theology in these conversations is to critique the implicit cultures found in the modern psychologies and to provide the critical and normative background to these conversations in culture.

One of the aspects of Browning's work that distinguishes his position from that of other pastoral theologians is that he leaves the door open for the modern psychologies to make a positive contribution to Christian theology and ethics. He envisions a two-way dialogue between religion and the modern psychologies. On the one hand, the role of theology is to analyze and critique the religious and ethical horizons of the modern psychologies, especially when they constitute counter-cultural or anticultural forces. On the other hand, theology needs to be open to the possibility that certain elements in the modern psychologies constitute a source of wisdom for contemporary society and may serve as a corrective to traditional religion, calling people back to authentic Christian witness.

Browning's emphasis on the mutual relation between the modern psychologies and Christian faith recalls an earlier theme from the period of correlation in pastoral counseling. The issue is whether psychotherapy deepens theology or theology deepens psychotherapy. Browning's writings suggest that both of these statements may, in fact, be true.

One of the most provocative questions Browning asks is

whether the modern psychologies serve the religious purposes of contemporary people better than traditional religion. In asking this question he is raising the issue of the proper relationship between religion and the modern psychologies and the role the modern psychologies *should* play among the resources of modern culture. Browning queries:

Will our culture be oriented and directed by our inherited religious traditions or will it increasingly gain its orientation, especially with regard to the inner life, from the modern psychologies?<sup>17</sup>

Browning suggests that the modern psychologies are filling the void left by the decline of institutional religion. The culture has witnessed a conversion to secular psychotherapy. He argues:

*traditional religion and modern psychology stand in a special relation to one another because both of them provide concepts and technologies for the ordering of the interior life.*<sup>18</sup>

People are desperate to find effective methods to deal with their inner lives. Psychological methods happen to be what is available.<sup>19</sup>

Browning proposes that at least part of the popularity of the secular psychotherapies is the result of a hunger for

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<sup>17</sup> Browning, *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies*, 2.

<sup>18</sup> Browning, *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies*, 2.

<sup>19</sup> For an excellent discussion of the ways of religion and depth psychology in relation to human interiority, see Ann Ulanov and Barry Ulanov, *Religion and the Unconscious* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975).

methods of practical living on the part of modern persons. He observes that the Reformation had a major effect on the Judeo-Christian tradition of the cure of souls. Within the Protestant Church what was lost was most of the methods of religious guidance in daily life. Browning suggests that "the secular therapies . . . actually may be imitating the historical tradition of the Christian cure of souls."<sup>20</sup>

Thus, whereas the original impetus behind the adoption of modern psychology and psychotherapy was to aid in the task of soul cure, because of the changing cultural context, modern psychology and psychotherapy have taken over this traditional religious function.

The Neglect of the Theological Pole  
in Pastoral Counseling

As a consequence of the dominance of the psychological pole in contemporary pastoral care and counseling, there has been a growing tension between theological language and psychological language as formative for the discipline. In

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<sup>20</sup> Don S. Browning, "The Pastoral Counselor as Ethicist: What Difference Do We Make?" *Journal of Pastoral Care* 42, no. 4 (Winter 1988): 295. In this article Browning argues that all psychotherapists, secular or religious, are ethicists and culture makers in that they mediate cultural visions to their clients. He suggests that pastoral counselors have an advantage over secular therapists in that they function within a context, the Judeo-Christian tradition, that makes its ethic explicit.

Browning makes a similar point in the *Moral Context of Pastoral Care* where he contends that one of the responsibilities of the pastoral counselor is the creating and maintaining of religiocultural value frameworks. Without a recognition of the religiocultural context of counseling, he maintains, counseling and psychotherapy can undermine culture. (See pp. 114-15.)



response to this trend, a number of pastoral theologians have voiced a growing concern for the recovery of pastoral counseling's theological roots.<sup>21</sup> The viewpoints of three of the leading figures in this discussion will be considered. They include: Charles V. Gerkin, who emphasizes the importance of balancing the use of historical and theological sources with psychological sources in pastoral counseling; John B. Cobb, Jr., who stresses the need for a genuinely theological model of pastoral counseling; and Thomas C. Oden, who advocates a return to classical models of pastoral care as a source for developing models of pastoral counseling.

A commitment to integration has been at the core of the contemporary pastoral counseling movement. However, with the increasing dominance of the psychological pole, critics have charged that the theological pole has been neglected.

One approach to the problem of integration in pastoral counseling is found in the work of Charles V. Gerkin. Gerkin's work is of interest because he attempts to address the neglect of the theological pole while remaining committed to the task of integration.

According to Gerkin, the problem with what is termed pastoral psychotherapy today is that its methodology relies primarily upon psychological and psychotherapeutic criteria. He maintains that the fundamental images and language of the

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<sup>21</sup> See Gerkin, 17.

Christian tradition somehow need to play a role in the methodological decisions of pastoral counselors. He poses the question, What is the role of historic Christian sources in the formation of the ministry of pastoral counseling? Gerkin is concerned about "the absorption of pastoral counseling ministry into psychotherapy to the point of loss of the pastor's rootage in the Christian tradition and language."<sup>22</sup>

Commenting on the central task for pastoral care and counseling during this time of transition from a preoccupation with psychological concerns to a renewed interest in theological issues, Gerkin observes that one important aspect is the "recovery of a genuinely theological definition of the task of pastoral care and counseling."<sup>23</sup> A theological definition of pastoral counseling informs the actual process of counseling. Theological language needs to be a part of the pastoral counselor's reflections on the counseling process. Gerkin also contends that, at appropriate times in the counseling process, theological language should be explicitly used. Theological language should occupy an equal place alongside psychological language and, at times, "even assert its authority as primary for pastoral counseling."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Gerkin, 21.

<sup>23</sup> Gerkin, 18.

<sup>24</sup> Gerkin, 18.

However, Gerkin adds an important qualification. He states that the task is not simply to recover theological origins and language. He argues that pastoral counseling is, indeed, a modern discipline and needs to incorporate insights from secular psychotherapy. Gerkin defines the root question facing contemporary pastoral care and counseling: "How can pastoral counseling be both an authentically theological and a scientifically psychological discipline?"<sup>25</sup>

Gerkin sees the solution to this dilemma residing in what he terms "a hermeneutical theory of pastoral counseling."<sup>26</sup> A hermeneutical theory of pastoral counseling sees as its primary task the relating of the two language worlds of theology and psychology. He advocates "an even-handed usage of both psychological and theological paradigms."<sup>27</sup> Thus, Gerkin remains faithful to the liberal origins of the contemporary pastoral counseling movement, defining the central task of the discipline as employing modern scientific methods in the ministry of soul cure without abandoning its roots in the Christian faith.

John Cobb is the second theologian whose position will be considered here. His position is important because of the central role theology plays in his approach to the

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<sup>25</sup> Gerkin, 11.

<sup>26</sup> Gerkin, 19.

<sup>27</sup> Gerkin, 21.

problem. Cobb's thesis in *Theology and Pastoral Care* is that theology is what distinguishes pastoral care and counseling from the mental health field in general. Rather than focusing on interdisciplinary aspects of pastoral counseling, he chooses to focus on the need for a theological understanding of the pastoral counseling process.<sup>28</sup>

Cobb suggests that, as long as the basic model of counseling is defined by other professions, pastoral counseling does not vary significantly from other varieties of counseling.<sup>29</sup> He observes that, under these circumstances, "theology has little to say about the goals and methods of this kind of counseling."<sup>30</sup> Cobb raises the issue of whether theology has anything to offer that is relevant to the actual practice of pastoral counseling. He argues that counseling as central to the pastoral role should be informed by theology.

Cobb's approach to the problem of the dominance of the

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<sup>28</sup> John B. Cobb, Jr., *Theology and Pastoral Care*, Creative Pastoral Care and Counseling Series, ed. Howard J. Clinebell, Jr. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977).

<sup>29</sup> On this point Browning observes that what pastoral counseling specialists do in their therapeutic sessions is virtually indistinguishable from what happens in secular psychotherapy. See Browning, *Moral Context of Pastoral Care*, 22.

Responding to the term "pastoral psychotherapist," Gerkin argues that when the word psychotherapy takes on enough of the technical psychotherapeutic meaning, any practical difference between pastoral psychotherapy and any other kind of psychotherapy disappears. See Gerkin, 15.

<sup>30</sup> Cobb, *Theology and Pastoral Care*, 3.

psychological pole in pastoral counseling is to make a distinction between pastoral counseling as ministry to human need in general and pastoral counseling as making Christian faith effective. Emphasizing this aspect of pastoral counseling highlights its religious function.

Cobb clearly chooses to focus on this second dimension of pastoral counseling. The assumption is that sufficient attention has been paid to pastoral counseling as ministry to human need in general. What is critical for the field at the present time in its development is a clear theological understanding of pastoral counseling. Cobb introduces his approach to this problem by posing the following questions: "Can pastors [and pastoral counselors] bring their faith to bear on the goals, methods, and resources of counseling? Is there a type of counseling that is given distinctive shape and direction . . . by Christian understanding of God and the world?"<sup>31</sup> He then proceeds to formulate his answer from the perspective of process theology.

For Cobb, the issue of a uniquely theological understanding of pastoral counseling is closely related to the use of historical and theological sources. He urges pastoral counselors to "become more aware of the relationship of what they are doing to the cumulative wisdom of the church."<sup>32</sup> His point is that the church cannot

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<sup>31</sup> Cobb, *Theology and Pastoral Care*, 4.

<sup>32</sup> John B. Cobb, Jr., "Pastoral Counseling and Theology," in *Handbook for Basic Types of Pastoral Care and*

survive apart from its historical and theological sources. Traditional religious language is one of these sources. For many people in the liberal churches a gap exists between daily life and religious categories. He maintains that "if the church is to overcome this gap and regain its health, it must recover the ability to use historic Christian imagery and rhetoric with power and authenticity."<sup>33</sup> The solution, according to Cobb, lies in establishing "a *living* relationship to the language of the Bible."<sup>34</sup> He concludes:

But if this is to happen, it must grow out of the living experience of Christian people who are fully immersed in the modern world. They must find that the authentic use of biblical material illumines their experience and brings to consciousness aspects of that experience that have been neglected or obscured by modern conceptualities.<sup>35</sup>

Both Gerkin and Cobb stress the importance of historical and theological sources in contemporary pastoral counseling. Thomas Oden goes one step further. He advocates a return to classical models of pastoral care as a primary source for developing models of pastoral counseling.

The third theologian whose position will be considered here is Thomas C. Oden. His work is relevant to this study because of the importance he places on the use of historical

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*Counseling*, eds. Howard W. Stone and William M. Clements (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 18.

<sup>33</sup> Cobb, *Theology and Pastoral Care*, 58.

<sup>34</sup> Cobb, *Theology and Pastoral Care*, 59, emphasis mine.

<sup>35</sup> Cobb, *Theology and Pastoral Care*, 61.

sources in pastoral care and counseling. Oden argues that, as a consequence of its preoccupation with modern psychology and psychotherapy, the field of pastoral care and counseling has become forgetful of previous traditions of pastoral care.

In his critique of contemporary pastoral care and counseling Oden points to two related trends. The first trend is what he terms "modern psychological accommodation."<sup>36</sup> While Oden acknowledges that the modern psychologies have made a positive contribution to contemporary pastoral care and counseling, his overall evaluation of their impact upon the field is negative.

Oden defines psychological accommodation as the unreflective accommodation of schools of psychology and psychotherapy into the field of pastoral care and counseling. Thus, the task of the pastoral counselor in recent years has been to "ferret out" whatever secular psychotherapies happen to be in vogue at the time and to adapt them to the practice of ministry.<sup>37</sup> Oden expresses concern about the degree to which pastoral care and counseling has become dependent upon and indebted to modern psychology. He argues that one of the consequences of this development is that the ministry of pastoral care and

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<sup>36</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *Care of Souls in the Classic Tradition*, Theology and Pastoral Care Series, ed. Don S. Browning (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 32.

<sup>37</sup> Oden, 33.

counseling ends up being defined by the contemporary psychotherapies.

Oden highlights a second factor in his critique. He argues that contemporary pastoral care and counseling has developed an attitude of pervasive amnesia toward the classical Christian past. He accuses the field of turning its collective back upon its own heritage. Oden comments that "even the best representatives of American pastoral care . . . have not really probed the depths of the classical tradition."<sup>38</sup> He concludes that pastoral care and counseling has allowed its identity to be shaped primarily by secular psychotherapy rather than by the theological tradition.

Oden draws a connection between the attitude of pervasive amnesia toward the classical pastoral past and modern consciousness. He is sharply critical of modern chauvinism, especially the assumption that modern modes of knowing are superior to modes of knowing from all other times.

Oden's discussion of contemporary pastoral care and counseling extends to a critique of theological method. He categorizes the prevailing theological method in the field as pietistic in its emphasis on personal experience. He points out that traditional sources for doing theology--such as historical experience, reason, scripture, and tradition--

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<sup>38</sup> Oden, 11.



are neglected or ignored. Oden is harsh in his criticism that much of pastoral care and counseling is ungrounded in the biblical or historical tradition. Neither is it theologically sound nor articulate. He concludes:

"Protestant and Catholic pastoral counseling has been drawn into a collusive relationship with an accomodationist theology that has seduced it into a partial or substantive disavowal of historic Christianity."<sup>39</sup>

While decrying the current state of pastoral care and counseling, Oden sees signs of a reversal in this trend. He points to "the emerging hunger for classical wisdom."<sup>40</sup> He comments on the irony that, while pastors and pastoral counselors have been turning their backs on their pastoral heritage, it is the secular psychologists and psychotherapists who are calling pastors back to an awareness of this tradition and a recovery of pastoral identity.<sup>41</sup>

In response to his assessment of contemporary pastoral care and counseling, Oden outlines his proposal for "an enriched synthesis between classical and contemporary pastoral care."<sup>42</sup> He believes that the field is confronting

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<sup>39</sup> Oden, 41.

<sup>40</sup> Oden, 33.

<sup>41</sup> Gerald G. May is a good example of a psychiatrist who has become deeply interested in the Eastern and Western contemplative traditions. His writings enjoy considerable popularity in psychological as well as in religious circles.

<sup>42</sup> Oden, 18.

"an unprecedented identity crisis."<sup>43</sup> For Oden the key issue with regard to resolving this crisis is whether or not pastoral care and counseling has a "definable historic identity."<sup>44</sup> He speaks of the "lost or misplaced" treasure of pastoral identity, and then questions whether that treasure can be recovered.<sup>45</sup>

For Oden, the key to an enriched synthesis lies in rediscovering and remining classical models of Christian pastoral care. These models are available in "a series of venerable texts."<sup>46</sup> He criticizes contemporary writers in the field for their neglect of classical texts in favor of more modern sources, arguing that therapeutic writers have become the authoritative guides for pastoral counselors. He even includes a list of what he considers to be some of the key authors in the history of pastoral care.

Oden concludes with his proposal for an "enriched synthesis between old and new."<sup>47</sup> He states:

The task that lies ahead is the development of a postmodern, post-Freudian, neoclassical approach to Christian pastoral care that takes seriously the resources of modernity while also penetrating its illusions and, having found the best of modern psychotherapies problematic, has turned again to the classical tradition for its bearings, yet

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<sup>43</sup> Oden, 13.

<sup>44</sup> Oden, 18.

<sup>45</sup> Oden, 18.

<sup>46</sup> Oden, 26.

<sup>47</sup> Oden, 36.

without disowning what it has learned from modern clinical experience.<sup>48</sup>

Of the above theologians Oden most clearly affirms the connection between present day pastoral care and counseling and the ancient tradition of the cure of souls.

This concludes the second sub-section. The theme has been the growing tension between theological sources and psychological sources as central for pastoral care and counseling. A number of solutions have been proposed from a more balanced use of theological and psychological sources to a return to classical models of pastoral care. However divergent their approaches, the above theologians agree upon the necessity of recovering a theological understanding of the pastoral counseling process.

#### Pastoral Counseling and Spiritual Direction:

##### The Same Process?

The third critique of the contemporary pastoral counseling movement that will be considered here comes from a group of writers representing the field of spiritual direction.<sup>49</sup> Their critique is relevant to this study for

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<sup>48</sup> Oden, 37.

<sup>49</sup> These writers include: Martin Thornton, Kenneth Leech, Tilden Edwards and Gerald May. They represent one strand in contemporary Anglican and Episcopal spiritual direction. A common thread among them is their association with the Shalem Center for Spiritual Formation in Washington, D.C., one of the leading centers for spiritual direction in this country.

Tilden Edwards is an Episcopal priest and Director of the Shalem Institute. Gerald May is a well-known psychiatrist interested in the relationship between psychology and spirituality. He has served on the faculty of the training program in spiritual direction sponsored by

two reasons. On the one hand, it critique bears a striking resemblance to the critiques offered by the above theologians. On the other hand, their position is distinct in that they approach the problem of the dominance of the psychological pole in pastoral counseling from the sister discipline of spiritual direction.

Their perspective is of interest here for a variety of reasons. In the first place, they take a fundamentally different stance toward the use of modern psychology and psychotherapy in the process of spiritual guidance than does contemporary pastoral counseling. Second, rather than emphasizing the continuity between pastoral counseling and spiritual guidance, these writers highlight the differences between the two. Third, they are generally critical of attempts at integrating psychology and spirituality. Fourth, they point to the phenomenon of the secularization of guidance today. And, finally, they emphasize the religious dimension of human experience.

In order to better understand this position, each of these points will be considered in turn.

To begin with, in contrast to the contemporary pastoral counseling movement with its liberal Protestant origins,

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the Shalem Institute. Kenneth Leech is an Anglican priest and author of a number of works in the area of spirituality and spiritual direction. His works have been frequently used by the Shalem Institute. Martin Thornton is also an Anglican priest and authority on spiritual theology and spiritual direction. Leech makes numerous references to Thornton in his writings.

these writers reflect a much different attitude toward the role of modern psychology and psychotherapy in spiritual guidance. Whereas pastoral counselors have generally viewed developments in modern psychology and psychotherapy in a positive light, these writers offer a more negative assessment. Underlying this negative assessment is the belief that the process of spiritual guidance has become psychologized. This conclusion is not that far off from the critiques offered by the above theologians.

Commenting on the relationship between psychology and spiritual guidance, Gerald May observes that until modern times few distinctions were drawn between psychological and spiritual disorders. However, this changed drastically with the advent of Freudian psychoanalysis. One of the premises of Freudian psychology--which was influential in the early days of the contemporary pastoral counseling movement--was that the human mind could be understood scientifically. While this belief led to many positive developments in the expansion of knowledge about human psychology, it also had the profound effect of taking psychology out of the realm of spirit. Psychology and psychotherapy gradually came to supplant moral and spiritual guidance. Psychiatrists and psychologists became the new priesthood. People increasingly turned to psychology for guidance in their daily lives. In order to keep up with the need for in-depth guidance, clergy took psychological training. The field of pastoral counseling, with its emphasis on training in

psychology and psychotherapy, developed in response to this need. It was primarily a Protestant venture.<sup>50</sup>

In the second place, these writers raise the issue of the relationship between pastoral counseling and spiritual direction. Some see the pastoral counseling movement as a new type of direction. Is the pastoral counseling movement a synonym for the cure of souls?<sup>51</sup> This group contends that, while there are some similarities between pastoral counseling and spiritual direction, there are also some significant differences.<sup>52</sup> They argue that in pastoral counseling psychological concerns are predominate, whereas in spiritual direction prayer and spirituality are primary.

On the one hand, the content of pastoral care and counseling is generally mental and emotional issues. The intent is more efficient living. The focus is on pathology and disorder. The emphasis is primarily upon crisis intervention and problem-solving. In addition, pastoral counseling tends to be clinic or office based. Individual concerns are at the forefront, at times to the neglect of social justice issues.

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<sup>50</sup> See Gerald G. May, *Care of Mind, Care of Spirit: Psychiatric Dimensions of Spiritual Direction* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982), 2-3.

<sup>51</sup> See Kenneth Leech, *Soul Friend: The Practice of Christian Spirituality* (San Francisco: Harper and Row: 1977), 90-136.

<sup>52</sup> See May, *Care of Mind, Care of Spirit*, 12-15. See also Leech, *Soul Friend*, 90-104; and Martin Thornton, *Spiritual Direction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley Pub., 1984), 9-11.

On the other hand, the content of spiritual direction includes spiritual issues, the directee's prayer life and religious experience. The intent is to attend to God's presence in the her or his life. Spiritual direction is not crisis intervention, but a process. If pastoral counseling deals with problems, then spiritual direction takes over as soon as they are solved. Spiritual direction is a positive way forward where the focus is on growth, completion and fulfillment. It is located within the liturgical and sacramental framework of the church. Spiritual direction may also come into opposition against cultural standards and values.

Gerald May contrasts psychology and spiritual guidance. He states: "Psychology is fundamentally objective, secular, and willful whereas the core identity of religion is mysterious, spiritual, and willing."<sup>53</sup> The emphasis in psychology is on mastery and control. According to May, the key to spirituality is the attitude of willingness. He argues that there are limits to the psychological universe. Psychology is simply not big enough to incorporate human spiritual longing.

Third, these writers are not, as a rule, interested in the integration of psychology and spirituality. This is in marked contrast to the attitude toward integration in pastoral counseling. The core of the contemporary pastoral

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<sup>53</sup> Gerald G. May, *Will and Spirit: A Contemplative Psychology* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982), 10.

counseling movement is a commitment to the task of integration.

Gerald May addresses the topic of the integration of psychology and spirituality in his writings. He acknowledges that there are many similarities between the two disciplines, but argues that there are also basic differences. Blurring the differences between the two risks psychologizing the whole process. He contends that in most efforts at integration religion is at a disadvantage, continually having to apologize for itself. As an example, May points to pastoral counseling programs which attempt to integrate: "Such programs have been filled with courses in which psychotherapists teach clergy how to do counseling. Only rarely does one encounter clergy teaching therapists how to pray."<sup>54</sup> Instead of integration, May argues, the result is the absorption of religion into psychology.

May comments on trends he observes in society today. On the one hand, he sees a growing disenchantment with psychology. On the other, he points to a renewed interest in spirituality. May contends that the church is ill-prepared to meet this need, however. Yet, he sees signs of change in the push to reclaim older traditions of spiritual guidance.

Likewise, Tilden Edwards is not particularly interested in the integration of modern psychology and psychotherapy

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<sup>54</sup> May, *Will and Spirit*, 10-11.



with spiritual direction. He argues that, alongside secular psychotherapy, there is a great need for "the complimentary art of spiritual direction."<sup>55</sup> In response to this need, Edwards calls for "a reappropriation of structures for personal spiritual guidance."<sup>56</sup>

Fourth, this group comments on the general trend toward the secularization of guidance. Edwards argues that one reason for the neglect of spiritual direction today is the rise of modern psychology and psychotherapy. He observes that "the only 'guide to living' allowed on the public payroll . . . is the counselor/therapist."<sup>57</sup> These guides are trained in the most up-to-date theories and techniques of psychology and psychotherapy. However, Edwards contends, they are cut off from their older roots in theology, philosophy, and ethics. He concludes that, while mental-health professionals help people cope with problems of emotional life, they are inadequately prepared to deal with deeper existential issues of value and meaning.

Edwards makes a point similar to one Browning raised concerning the issue of how contemporary society will be guided. He observes that religious professionals receive much the same training as do mental-health professionals.

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<sup>55</sup> Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Friend: Reclaiming the Gift of Spiritual Direction* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 29.

<sup>56</sup> Edwards, 54.

<sup>57</sup> Edwards, 19.

As part of their professional education, religious leaders study developmental psychology as well as counseling theories and techniques. Modern psychology and psychotherapy have become the basic orienting disciplines in this culture. Edwards concludes that the religious leadership of the church is left in the position of being dependent upon secular models of human growth.

Last, this critique emphasizes the religious dimension of human experience. Edwards argues that what is missing in the lives of people today is an adequate bridge linking "the depth of historical and contemporary religious experience and interpretation concretely with a person's unique situation."<sup>58</sup> He points out that in the Roman Catholic and Anglican traditions spiritual direction is the bridge between daily life and the religious dimension in human experience. Spiritual theology or ascetical and mystical theology is the theoretical discipline which grounds the practice of spiritual direction. He adds that in Protestant traditions there is no common term for this area of theology. However, it is often referred to as pastoral theology. For Edwards spiritual guidance is not just for committed Christians. It provides a process or "way in" to the Holy for all serious seekers.<sup>59</sup>

According to Edwards, neither mental-health

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<sup>58</sup> Edwards, 1-2.

<sup>59</sup> Edwards, 8.

professionals nor religious professionals are adequately prepared to help people make the connection between the religious dimension and daily life. He believes that one source of the difficulty is a lack of spiritual theology in theological education today. For Edwards, spiritual direction is the missing discipline bridging daily life and the religious dimension of human experience.

Edwards believes that a solution to the dilemma lies in exploring more deeply the experiential tradition of Christian spirituality, lest the church have no unique heart left to offer people. He argues:

Theological interpretation is important, but it is no substitute for an awareness of the experiential tradition, and indeed even this awareness is not enough. An 'inner' firsthand understanding is called for, personal, experiential exploration of selected practices of prayer, fasting, and other classical spiritual disciplines.<sup>60</sup>

### The Spiritual Dimension of Pastoral

#### Counseling

The previous sub-section looked at the problem of the dominance of the psychological pole in contemporary pastoral counseling from the perspective of several writers in the field of spiritual direction. They point out that the process of guidance has become psychologized. They also contend that psychological methods are inadequate to address the religious dimension of human experience. In order to retain the uniqueness of the religious or spiritual

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<sup>60</sup> Edwards, 33.

dimension of guidance, they advocate a recovery of the tradition of spiritual direction.

Nelson Thayer is a Protestant pastoral theologian who addresses many of the concerns raised previously, although his position differs in significant respects. He agrees with the preceding group as far as recognizing the importance of the spiritual dimension of human experience. However, he disagrees with them regarding the role of modern psychology and psychotherapy in contemporary pastoral care and counseling.

In *Spirituality and Pastoral Care* Thayer, too, makes the observation that psychotherapeutic models have dominated contemporary pastoral care and counseling in recent times. For Thayer, the concept of spirituality moves the field beyond this preoccupation. At the same time, he remains thoroughly committed to "an understanding of the human that takes seriously contemporary psychoanalytic thought, humanistic, transpersonal psychologies, and the psychology of consciousness."<sup>61</sup>

Thayer also emphasizes the importance of the cultural context in understanding the direction of the contemporary pastoral counseling movement. The cultural phenomenon of modernity is of key importance in this respect.

Thayer argues that modernity is directly related to the

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<sup>61</sup> Nelson S. T. Thayer, *Spirituality and Pastoral Care, Theology and Pastoral Care Series*, ed. Don S. Browning (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 62.

rise of modern science, and that secularization is one of its most important consequences. The secularizing trend in the culture has contributed to the modern worldview wherein reality is defined by empirical science. Other sources of knowledge are excluded. According to Thayer, scientific objectivism has resulted in a twofold loss in the culture, the loss of transcendence and the loss of interiority. These losses have had a profound effect on modern spirituality.

Thayer maintains that, intellectually, the culture is in a postmodern era. He suggests that there are a variety of stances toward modernity. Only two will be mentioned here.

On the one hand, there are those writers who have become disillusioned with modernity. Thayer cites Thomas Oden as a representative of this group. Those pastoral theologians who fall into this category have turned to the historical tradition as the most reliable source on the nature and cure of souls. They stress the rediscovery and reaffirmation of the tradition over against the claims of modernity and modern science. They seek a rerooting in the tradition.

In contrast, Thayer puts forth his own position which he describes as a postmodern stance. He characterizes this attitude toward modernity: "It seeks neither to refute,

deny, nor repudiate the developments of modernity."<sup>62</sup>

Thayer lists a number of developments in recent intellectual history which characterize a postmodern stance.<sup>63</sup>

First, Thayer summarizes a postmodern attitude toward modern science. Recent developments in science and philosophy challenge the popular view of science. This view perceives science as objective, mechanistic, substance oriented, materialistic, and deterministic. It is an outmoded, seventeenth-century understanding.

Thayer comments that modern science is rooted in the empirical method of investigation. Knowledge is arrived at through the senses or through technology as an extension of the senses. What is real is measurable and only what is measurable is real. This is the positivistic view of science. Knowing subject and the object under observation are separated. One of the most far-reaching consequences of this worldview is the divorce of faith from reason, religion from science.

However, as a result of changes in the theory and practice of science over the last century, this positivistic understanding has been challenged. Recent developments in philosophy have relativized the positivistic bias of the empirical method. It has been demonstrated that the separation of subject and object as the basis of knowing has

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<sup>62</sup> Thayer, 20.

<sup>63</sup> See Thayer, 16-25.

its limitations. The theory of relativity has shown that no absolute measurements are possible. Quantum physics has proven that the ultimate particles in the universe are not substances but pulses of energy. The uncertainty principle confirms that the process of measuring disturbs and influences what is being measured. The experimenter influences the results of the experiment.

Second, Thayer includes a postmodern attitude toward Freud. On the one hand, a postmodern stance affirms Freud's critique of religion. It acknowledges the function of projection in religious ideation, the element of unconscious wish-fulfillment present in religious beliefs. A postmodern stance acknowledges the contribution of Freudian psychoanalysis in exposing self-deception in religious consciousness. On the other hand, a postmodern stance argues that the religious dimension of human experience cannot be reduced to the projection of unconscious desires.<sup>64</sup> In contrast to Oden's position, Thayer proposes that a postmodern stance,

rather than refuting Freud's modernist critique, seeks to include it in a more comprehensive understanding of the human informed by the full range of the disciplines of modernity rather than striking out from behind the walls of tradition.<sup>65</sup>

Third, a postmodern stance recognizes the pluralistic

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<sup>64</sup> For an illuminating discussion of the function of religion as offering true or false containment of primordial experience, see Ulanov and Ulanov, *Religion and the Unconscious*, 25-26.

<sup>65</sup> Thayer, 22.

nature of the cultural situation. Different religious and philosophical positions offer competing claims of truth. Rather than simply viewing these claims in opposition to one another, a postmodern stance attempts to understand their foundations in experience.

Fourth, a postmodern stance includes the recovery of transcendence. The religious dimension of human experience is the human experience of the transcendent, what is perceived as holy or sacred. The context of modernity has made it possible "to bracket traditional claims of truth of religious systems and to look at them as they present themselves in human experience."<sup>66</sup> Thayer points out the contribution of a phenomenological approach to religious experience.

Finally, Thayer maintains that the recovery of transcendence is related to the recovery of interiority. He argues that, under the influence of modernity, "interiority itself . . . has tended to have been captured by depth psychology (when it wasn't declared nonexistent by behavioral psychology)."<sup>67</sup> He contends that pastoral care and counseling needs "to recover the realm of interiority as it recovers the realm of transcendence."<sup>68</sup> The recovery of the realm of interiority also leads to the recovery of a

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<sup>66</sup> Thayer, 23.

<sup>67</sup> Thayer, 25.

<sup>68</sup> Thayer, 25.



sense of God's immanence in one's life.

Thayer states that contemporary anthropology, the understanding of the human, has been significantly influenced by depth psychology. He observes that some theologians, such as Oden, advocate minimizing contributions from modern psychology and psychotherapy in favor of historical understandings of the human found in the classical tradition of pastoral care. Thayer disagrees with this position. He contends that contemporary anthropology must be informed by depth psychology because it provides a vital perspective on human nature and development. However, he also maintains that an adequate anthropology must pay attention to the spiritual dimension of human experience.<sup>69</sup> Thayer argues that the sources of such an anthropology include an understanding of the person found in depth psychology *modified* by insights from the phenomenology of religion and the study of spirituality.

Thayer adds that, to the extent that the churches--and pastoral counseling--have accommodated modernity, their self-understanding has been informed by psychotherapeutic theory. He observes that depth psychology and Protestant theology have tended to ignore or deny the spiritual

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<sup>69</sup> In some respects Thayer's position resembles Browning's on this point. Speaking of the cure of souls, Browning states that "before the modern period, persons were seen in a religious and spiritual context." Browning goes on to make a point similar to Oden's in suggesting that a historical review of pastoral care may help pastoral counselors to discover images of the human that are relevant today. See Browning, *Moral Context of Pastoral Care*, 39.

dimension of human experience. One of the consequences of this attitude is that the liberal churches have been unable to experience, recognize, or nurture the dimension of spirit.

What does Thayer mean by spirit? He defines spirit as the human capacity for union with the transcendent: "It is that in the human which longs for union with the whole of Being."<sup>70</sup> Spirit is close to the meaning of heart in the anthropology of Greek and Russian spirituality. Spirit and spirituality are fundamental human categories. Spirituality is not limited to Christian experience.<sup>71</sup>

Thayer contends that the recovery of the spiritual dimension of human experience is the most important task of pastoral care--and counseling--today. Spirituality refers to "the sense of the experience of continuity between one's own deepest experience and the deepest, sustaining power and meaning of the universe."<sup>72</sup> Spiritual formation is the ongoing process of deepening one's relationship to the

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<sup>70</sup> Thayer, 50.

<sup>71</sup> For an excellent discussion of contemporary studies in spirituality, see *Modern Christian Spirituality: Methodological and Historical Essays*, ed. Bradley C. Hanson, American Academy of Religion Studies in Religion Series, no. 62 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990).

In Chapter 1, "Spirituality in the Academy," Sandra M. Schneiders comments on the increasing interest in spirituality both in Catholic and Protestant Churches. She also argues that the term spirituality refers to a fundamental dimension of human experience. See Schneiders in *Modern Christian Spirituality*, 15-37.

<sup>72</sup> Thayer, 66.

transcendent.

As he lays out his theory of pastoral care, Thayer discusses the function of prayer in spiritual formation. He defines prayer as "the focused endeavor to open [one's] awareness to the reality of the transcendent."<sup>73</sup> He comments on the irony of needing to make a case for prayer, listing some of the reasons people object to prayer today. He traces these attitudes back to themes of the Reformation and later developments in Protestantism. Thayer does not intend to downplay these accomplishments. Rather, he simply points out that some of these attitudes have led to the exclusion of much of value in the Christian tradition, as well as a central dimension of human experience.

According to Thayer, "lived experience is the center of spirituality."<sup>74</sup> The goal of prayer and other spiritual disciplines is to draw the person into, rather than away from, lived experience. He argues that critiques of private prayer as navel-gazing or avoidance of reality are off the mark. While some prayer may be self-centered, some action in the world may be an attempt at self-justification. Serious prayer, on the other hand, leads to an encounter with reality.

Thayer espouses a holistic view of spirituality. In the first place, spirituality does not just refer to inner

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<sup>73</sup> Thayer, 81.

<sup>74</sup> Thayer, 56.

feeling. It has to do with the integration of the whole of human life. Spirituality is the process by which the whole of life is integrated into awareness. Here, integration is understood as a process, not as a crowning goal to be achieved.

Secondly, the concepts of spirituality and spirit belong to the whole of life. Within the Christian tradition even the mystics structured their prayer within the context of the entire Christian life. Seen from within this larger framework, private prayer is only one means of opening to grace. Other means of grace include hearing the Word and receiving the sacraments. Thayer observes that "action in participation with the poor and oppressed is also recognized as essential to the deepened awareness of and receptivity to the transcendent God."<sup>75</sup> Here, means of grace refers to "vehicles for the awareness of the presence of God, or the actions of God in our experience."<sup>76</sup>

In summary, the central focus of Thayer's work is the spiritual dimension of human experience in relation to the field of pastoral care. Thayer's position is unique among those referred to here in a number of respects. In the first place, he is more positive than some of the aforementioned in his assessment of the contribution of modern psychology and psychotherapy to the field of pastoral

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<sup>75</sup> Thayer, 81.

<sup>76</sup> Thayer, 81.

care and counseling. Second, he proposes that the concept of spirit counterbalances the emphasis on the psychological pole. Third, his notion of an understanding of the human which includes sources from depth psychology as well as from religion is a creative attempt at integration in the best of the liberal Protestant tradition. And, finally, his emphasis on spiritual formation as the most important task of pastoral care today and the role of prayer in this process, adds a much-needed perspective to contemporary pastoral care and counseling.

#### Discussion: The Position of This Study

The understanding of the pastoral counseling process which will be presented in the following chapters is, in part, a response to the preceding critique of the contemporary pastoral counseling movement. In this section, the focus will be on locating the position represented in this study with respect to the positions summarized in the previous section.

#### The Contribution of Modern Psychology and Psychotherapy to the Field of Pastoral Counseling

In continuity with its origins in the liberal Protestant tradition, this study affirms the use of modern psychology and psychotherapy in field of pastoral counseling. It recognizes the dual nature of the contemporary pastoral counseling movement: it is both an expression of the ancient tradition of the cure of souls and also a fully modern discipline. The understanding of

pastoral counseling represented here is consistent with the viewpoint expressed by Don Browning, namely, that there should be no logical conflict between science and theology. Thus, as pointed out by Charles Gerkin, one of the central challenges for pastoral counseling is the integration of insights from the modern sciences, including psychology and psychotherapy, with theology in a manner that remains faithful to both disciplines. However, some important qualifications need to be added to this position.

First, the view of pastoral counseling represented here agrees with Browning's position that the modern psychologies are independent sources of culture and need to be evaluated as such. While such a project does not fall within the scope of this study, it recognizes the importance of such a task.

Second, in accord with several of the theologians cited above, this study acknowledges the significance of the cultural context in assessing the impact of modern psychology and psychotherapy on the field of pastoral counseling. Major shifts have taken place in the relationship between psychology and religion during the current century. For example, the field of pastoral care and counseling has moved from an early attitude of unqualified enthusiasm for the use of scientific psychotherapy in the practice of ministry to a more cautious stance, at least in some quarters.

The field of pastor care and counseling has, in many

respects, simply mirrored broader changes in the culture. As a discipline it has embodied the general conversion to psychology witnessed in American society as a whole. Modern psychology and psychotherapy have stepped in to fill aspects of the vacuum created by the ebb of traditional religion in this country. To a large extent, secular psychotherapy has assumed what was once the religious function of the cure of souls.

The problem should not be laid at the doorstep of modern psychology and psychotherapy. They have provided, and continue to provide, ministry in general and pastoral counseling in particular with helpful tools to aid those in need. Rather, the problem has more to do with the role of religion in a secular age. One of the consequences of modernity is that many people today experience a profound alienation from traditional religious forms. This includes any sense of connection with the historical roots of faith. The integration of faith and experience, religion and daily life, is not just an issue in pastoral counseling. It is a problem for the liberal churches, as well as for all modern people. The question is, how is one to live fully in a world that is largely secular and, at the same time, remain connected to the religious dimension of human experience which is expressed in and through the world's great religious traditions?

### The Role of Theological and Historical Sources in Pastoral Counseling

The argument has been advanced that, as a consequence of its preoccupation with the psychological pole, contemporary pastoral counseling has neglected the theological pole and ignored previous traditions of pastoral care. This has resulted in a major identity crisis in the field. Being largely defined by secular psychotherapies, the question of what is unique about pastoral counseling remains unclear. This study sees the task of identifying a theological core to the pastoral counseling process as crucial to defining pastoral counseling's unique contribution to the growth and healing of persons.

Charles Gerkin's position stands out in relation to the other views summarized above in that he continues to place the task of integration at the center of pastoral counseling. Gerkin is concerned about two things. In the first place, he is critical of the heavy emphasis on psychological language and methods in pastoral psychotherapy. Second, Gerkin is uneasy about the extent to which the field of pastoral counseling has fallen away from its foundations in the core images and traditional language of the Christian faith. As a remedy to this situation, Gerkin proposes his hermeneutical approach to pastoral counseling which advocates a balanced use of psychological and theological sources.

This study takes Gerkin's concerns about methodology in



pastoral counseling seriously. In view of this, historical and theological sources play a primary role in the understanding the pastoral counseling process to be presented.

However, this study diverges from Gerkin's approach with regard to the place of integration in pastoral counseling. The position here in no way seeks to discount or minimize the importance of the contribution of modern psychology and psychotherapy to the field of pastoral counseling. However, rather than occupying a central role, as in Gerkin's hermeneutical theory, in this study integration is relegated to a peripheral position.

The reason for this goes back to Browning's question concerning the proper relationship between religion and the modern psychologies. Are theological and psychological sources equal? The view here is that they are not. It will be argued that the overall container for the pastoral counseling process is theological. However, the container has to be adequate to include and be enlarged by, contributions from modern psychology and psychotherapy.

Gerkin's work is an outstanding example of what pastoral counseling does best: integrating a particular psychotherapeutic perspective--in this case, object relations theory--with a theological perspective--namely, hermeneutical theory. However, his position has some limitations. He does not address some of the other important issues raised by the above theologians.

Without in any way downplaying the importance of the interdisciplinary nature of the field, John Cobb argues that theology is the key to understanding what is unique about pastoral counseling. He raises a crucial issue when he makes the distinction between pastoral counseling as ministry to human need in general and pastoral counseling as making Christian faith effective. The question comes to mind, Is all that pastoral counseling has to offer good psychotherapy? (This is not to say that there is anything wrong with this aspect of pastoral counseling.) Or, does pastoral counseling have something more to offer people today?

Cobb addresses the problem of this "something more" from the perspective of process theology. His formulation of spirit as what is distinctive in Christian existence and his notion of God as incarnate directivity are creative contributions to the field of pastoral counseling. However, his definition of spirit is only one way of understanding this central concept. There are other sources, historical as well as contemporary, for understanding this key notion. One of these, the tradition of the prayer of the heart, will serve as a primary source for understanding the concept of spirit in this study.

Cobb emphasizes that pastoral counseling needs to be grounded in the historical and theological sources of the Christian tradition, including its religious language and imagery. What is unique about Cobb's formulation of the

problem is his stress on the importance of establishing what he terms a living relationship with these sources.

One of the goals in this study is to present an understanding of the pastoral counseling process that draws upon historic Christian sources and that is also relevant to contemporary people. The position here agrees with Cobb that, in addition to needing to be relevant to daily life, religious language must also shed light on aspects of human experience that other languages, for example, psychological language, does not.

While disagreeing with the generally negative tone of Oden's assessment of modern psychology and psychotherapy, his position has been influential in the development of this project, especially his comments on the neglect of classical models of pastoral care in contemporary pastoral care and counseling.

Oden is on target when he argues that the question of whether pastoral care and counseling has a definable historic identity is one of the key issues facing the field today. The position here assumes that the unique contribution of pastoral counseling derives in part from its historic identity. Pastoral counseling is not simply a twentieth-century phenomenon which owes its existence to modern psychology and psychotherapy. Rather, it is rooted in the ancient tradition of the cure of souls. If it wants to maintain its uniqueness, it needs to be aware of those elements of the tradition that define its core.

Oden's characterization of pastoral identity as a lost or misplaced treasure contained in modern broken vessels is a powerful metaphor. In contrast, the position here maintains that the modern vessels--psychology and psychotherapy--are not so much broken as they are inadequate to contain the treasure. Modern psychology and psychotherapy provide helpful tools with which to effect human healing and transformation. However, in its fullest expression, pastoral counseling reflects a body of wisdom not contained within these disciplines.

This study takes Oden's critique of contemporary pastoral care and counseling seriously for its neglect of classical texts. Hence, a classical text in the Orthodox tradition of Christian spirituality was chosen as the primary source for understanding aspects of the pastoral counseling process. The prayer of the heart is the classic model of prayer in Eastern Christian spirituality.

This study can be viewed as an example of what Oden refers to as an enriched synthesis between classical and contemporary pastoral care. Without disowning the insights of depth psychology, the classical tradition of the prayer of the heart forms the core of the study. The goal of the project is the integration of one strand from the classical tradition, the prayer of the heart, with contemporary pastoral counseling.

Oden's critique of modernity also represents a challenge to contemporary pastoral counseling. His point

that dependence upon modern consciousness has prevented the field from looking at premodern sources of wisdom is well-taken. One of the assumptions underlying this study is that premodern wisdom has relevance and power for people today.

However, in addition to these points of agreement, there are several crucial respects in which the position represented in this study differs from Oden's position.

The position here strongly disagrees with Oden's negative assessment of modern psychology and psychotherapy. He gives lip service to the importance of clinical insight, but his overall tone is slighting. This study is more in line with Gerkin's remark that pastoral counselors are twentieth-century persons and need to make use of twentieth-century tools such as modern psychology and psychotherapy. The attitude of this study towards modernity most closely resembles Nelson Thayer's postmodern stance. To summarize, the position here argues for the value of classical models of pastoral care as an important source for contemporary pastoral counseling without the sharp critique of modern sources.

Finally, the classical tradition needs to be critiqued by contemporary disciplines. Browning's proposal for mutually critical conversations between religion and the modern psychologies permits a critique of the religious tradition by contemporary culture, as well as a critique of

contemporary culture by theology.<sup>77</sup> For example, in this study, the primary source will be critiqued by contemporary theologians for its dualistic worldview.

### The Spiritual Direction Function in

#### Pastoral Counseling

The third critique of the contemporary pastoral counseling movement, represented by a group of writers from the field of spiritual direction, emphasizes the differences between spiritual direction and pastoral counseling. This perspective views psychotherapy and spiritual guidance as complimentary, although not necessarily contradictory, processes. While these writers tend to define psychotherapy somewhat narrowly, in contrast to Oden, they generally do not try to disparage its contribution or effectiveness. There is less interest in criticizing modern psychology and psychotherapy and more concern with reestablishing a legitimate place for spiritual direction. Their goal is to distinguish between the two functions, especially to suggest some of the limitations of secular psychotherapy, and to point out how spiritual direction fills a need that is not being addressed by modern psychology and psychotherapy.

While the position here acknowledges the truth of many of their observations about differences between pastoral counseling and spiritual direction, the distinctions they

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<sup>77</sup> For an example of this type of two-way dialogue, see Browning's discussion of the Christian notion of self-sacrificial love in *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies*, 140-56.

draw tend to be somewhat rigid and over generalized. This is particularly true of their portrayal of psychotherapy and pastoral counseling as primarily focusing on pathology, problem-solving, and crisis intervention. Much of pastoral counseling and psychotherapy is growth-oriented and concerned with the transformation of persons and relationships.

This study contends that pastoral counseling includes both the functions of psychotherapy and spiritual direction. It deals with pathology, healing, problem solving, and crisis intervention, as well as with personal growth, transformation, wholeness, and salvation. In contrast to the view that if psychotherapy or pastoral counseling deal with problem solving, spiritual direction takes over when the problem is solved, the position here maintains that no such clear cut distinction can be made. Rather, it will be argued that there is a spiritual direction function present throughout the entire pastoral counseling process. God is active in the whole of human life and is not to be confined to the religious sphere. There is no separation between the secular and the religious spheres of life, although modern consciousness makes it difficult for contemporary people to experience this truth.

The position here agrees with some aspects of their position regarding integration and disagrees with other aspects. It would be hard to deny that in liberal Protestant theological education today coursework in

pastoral care and counseling, with a heavy emphasis on psychology and psychotherapy, predominates over the study of spiritual theology or spiritual direction. There is no argument with the criticism that, in many instances, sloppy efforts at integration have led to psychologizing the pastoral counseling process.

However, this is not necessarily a reason for abandoning the task all together. This study endorses Browning's project of critiquing the implicit worldviews and ethics contained in the modern psychologies and establishing criteria for evaluating which of the modern psychologies are more compatible with a given theological perspective. Gerkin's comment concerning the importance of undertaking the hard intellectual work of integration also comes to mind. Integration remains an important task in pastoral counseling. However, this study raises the question, should the task of integration always be the starting point in pastoral counseling?

It will be argued here that there are times when the task of integration can be accorded a secondary place in pastoral counseling. This is true for a number of reasons. In the first place, because of the dominance of the psychological pole in pastoral counseling, it is appropriate to place more emphasis on the theological pole in order to correct the overbalance. Second, the renewed interest in spirituality, in the churches as well as in the broader society, suggests that it is time to pay more attention to



the spiritual dimension of human experience and take a look at what the field of spiritual direction has to contribute to pastoral counseling. This is the position taken in this study.

Finally, these writers call attention the importance of the religious dimension of human experience. They argue that spirituality is not reducible to psychology. Pastoral counseling would do well to consider the implications of this for the field. Tilden Edward's notion that what is missing in people's lives today is an adequate bridge connecting daily life and the religious dimension of human experience points up the division between the sacred and the secular in contemporary life. He is not the only one suggesting that spiritual direction and spiritual theology are crucial sources in responding to this situation.

All of these writers emphasize the importance of experience in Christian spirituality. This theme is also echoed by Thayer. The position here is in full agreement on this point. As will be seen, the tradition of the prayer of the heart includes a strong experiential component.

#### The Spiritual Dimension of Pastoral Counseling

The fourth critique considered here is represented by Nelson Thayer. Thayer's central argument is that the concept of spirituality moves the field of pastoral care and counseling beyond its preoccupation with psychological models. Of all the above writers, the position of this study is closest to Thayer's.

First of all, Thayer identifies his stance as postmodern and then proceeds to define what this means. The position here can also be characterized as postmodern in the sense that Thayer uses the term. In Thayer's words, "[a postmodern stance] seeks neither to refute, deny, nor repudiate the developments of modernity."<sup>78</sup>

Thayer contrasts what he describes as a postmodern stance with the stance of those theologians who have expressed disenchantment with modernity. He refers to Oden as a representative of this group. Thayer observes that this attitude toward modernity advocates a return to the historical tradition as the best guide to the nature and cure of souls. It stresses a rediscovery and reaffirmation of the tradition over against the claims of modern science and seeks a rerooting in the tradition.

While the position represented here proposes the use of historical sources in understanding the pastoral counseling process, it does not imply that historical sources should be used exclusively or uncritically. The project is committed to exploring the tradition of the prayer of the heart as a source, but not at the expense of ignoring contributions from modern disciplines.

In the second place, along with Thayer, the position of this study affirms recent developments in science and philosophy. Several of these advances call for special

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<sup>78</sup> Thayer, 20.

mention.

Thayer's recognition of the pluralistic nature of the cultural situation has particular relevance for contemporary pastoral counseling. Many of those seeking pastoral counseling today have no connection to a church or come from a non-Christian background. One of the goals of this study is to develop an understanding of the pastoral counseling process that addresses the spiritual dimension of human experience while respecting the client's particular religious beliefs or lack thereof.

Thayer argues that the recovery of the realm of transcendence is one of the fundamental characteristics of a postmodern stance. This study is fully in agreement with Thayer on this point. Here, transcendence is understood as the deepening movement of grace at the heart of the universe.

The position here also wholeheartedly endorses Thayer's call for the recovery of the realm of interiority. His observation that under the influence of modernity the realm of interiority has been captured by depth psychology rings true for contemporary pastoral counseling. Thayer's comments on interiority call to mind Browning's concerns regarding the proper relationship between religion and the modern psychologies. Browning argued that religion and the modern psychologies stand in a special relationship to one another because they both have to do with human interiority. Along this same line, one of the primary contributions of

this study will be to present a spiritual method for relating to human interiority.

In the third place, the position represented here agrees with Thayer regarding sources for a contemporary anthropology. Thayer observes that the understanding of the human found in contemporary pastoral care has been significantly influenced by depth psychology. In contrast to Oden, Thayer argues that a contemporary anthropology must be informed by depth psychology. He adds an important qualification, however. An adequate anthropology must also pay attention to the spiritual dimension of human experience. According to Thayer, the sources of such an anthropology include depth psychology modified by insights from phenomenology of religion and studies in spirituality.

The position represented in this study is in agreement with Thayer regarding the importance of depth psychology as a source for contemporary anthropology. Yet, this position also resembles Oden's in some respects. It will be argued that understandings of the human from the classical tradition are relevant to and have power for a contemporary anthropology. However, these understandings of the human need to be critiqued and modified by contemporary anthropologies. This study relies primarily upon the understanding of the human found in the tradition of the prayer of the heart. This classical anthropology will be modified by contributions from depth psychology and contemporary studies in spirituality.

Thayer suggests that to the extent that liberal Protestantism and the field of pastoral counseling have accommodated modernity, their self-understanding has been significantly shaped by depth psychology. He points out that depth psychology and Protestant theology have tended to ignore or deny the spiritual dimension of human experience. As a consequence, liberal churches have generally been unable to experience, recognize or nurture the dimension of spirit. Thayer's observations on this matter call to mind Cobb's remark about the gap in the liberal churches between ordinary experience and religious language.

This study is in full agreement on this point. The problem of presenting the Christian tradition to people in a way that is both relevant and powerful is of vital importance to the churches today. Part of the motivation underlying this study is to reclaim one strand of the tradition of Christian spirituality for the field of pastoral counseling and, by implication, liberal Protestant churches, as well.

Thayer's definition of spirit is close to the definition of spirit found in this study. He defines spirit as the human capacity for union with the transcendent. According to Thayer, spirit is close to the meaning of heart. It is not surprising that Thayer's definition of spirit is similar to the understanding of spirit found in this study, since some of the sources are the same, namely, Eastern Christian spirituality.

Thayer's argument that spirituality is a fundamental human category and that this category is not limited to Christian experience is also extremely important to the field of pastoral counseling. It implies that the spiritual dimension is present in all counseling. This is contrary to the viewpoint of those who offer Christian counseling as one option among a variety of types of counseling available.

Pastoral counseling understands and addresses this dimension of human experience whether or not the client is a Christian and when this dimension is not explicitly spoken of in the counseling process. The advantage of the pastoral counselor, is that she or he has a rich perspective to draw upon in understanding and responding to this aspect of human life.

Thayer argues that the recovery of the spiritual dimension of human experience is the most important task of pastoral care--and counseling--today. This study agrees with him on this point. Thayer understands spirituality as a sense of continuity between the depths of one's self and the depths of the universe. He defines spiritual formation as the nurture of the spiritual dimension. It is the process of deepening one's relationship to the transcendent. For Thayer, prayer is the process of opening one's awareness to the presence of the transcendent. However, a sense of God's immanence, through an awareness of God's presence in one's experience, is equally important. As will be seen, there is considerable agreement between Thayer's position

and the position of this study on each of these points.

The position here is also in agreement with Thayer's comments regarding obstacles to prayer in the liberal Protestant churches. Along with Thayer, this study recognizes the importance of the contributions of the Reformation and Protestant theology. However, it also concurs with Thayer's comment that much of value in the previous tradition and in human experience was excluded. Browning's observations regarding the loss of methods for deepening religious experience following the Reformation are relevant here.

Thayer maintains that lived experience is the center of spirituality. Here his position is in basic accord with the positions of Leech, Edwards and May. There is agreement among these writers and within the tradition that the goal of prayer and the various spiritual disciplines is to draw persons more deeply into, not away from, lived experience. Many have criticized private prayer as a way of avoiding reality. However, the tradition of Christian spirituality has always maintained that true prayer nurtures and develops an attitude of openness to life. This is also the position of this study. The prayer of the heart takes one deeper into one's self as well as deeper into the heart of the world. As with any method or technique, spiritual or psychological, it can be used defensively, either as a way of avoiding truth or as a way of controlling one's awareness.

Finally, the position here affirms the holistic view of spirituality espoused by Thayer. Thayer argues that spirituality is not limited to subjective feelings, but is concerned with the integration of the whole of human life. As will be seen, within the tradition of the prayer of the heart, spirituality is not limited to inner subjective feelings. At its core, the prayer of the heart is a process of integration. Thayer also observes that integration is a process, not a goal to be achieved. This understanding is consistent with the perspective of the prayer of the heart where the goal of prayer is seen as a state of continual prayer.

Along with Thayer, the position here recognizes that the practice of prayer takes place within the context of the whole of the Christian life. Prayer is only one means of deepening grace. As will be seen, the practice of the prayer of the heart within the Eastern Christian tradition took place within the context of the monastic community which included participation in the liturgy of the church and the practice of Christian virtues, particularly an attitude of charity and compassion toward all creatures.

#### Method

This last section lays out the method to be employed in this study. It includes a statement of the thesis, a list of the goals of the study, a discussion of the primary sources to be utilized, and definitions of key terms.



### Thesis

The thesis of this study is that the prayer of the heart is a metaphor for the deepening movement of grace within the person. It will be argued that this dynamic forms the theological core of the pastoral counseling process. From this perspective, pastoral counseling can be understood as a process of spiritual formation.

### Goals

The first goal of this study is to make more explicit how pastoral counseling is a contemporary expression of the ancient tradition of the cure of souls. It will be recalled that the goal of the cure of souls is health of personality. This includes the psychological dimension of the human person. The therapeutic function of pastoral counseling addresses this dimension. However, the personality includes more than just the psychological dimension. It also includes the spiritual dimension of human experience. This aspect is addressed in the spiritual direction function of pastoral counseling.

The second goal is to propose a theological understanding of the pastoral counseling process. It will be argued that pastoral counseling has a theological core, and that this theological core is what distinguishes pastoral counseling from other varieties of counseling. It is one response to the question, what unique contribution does pastoral counseling make to the growth and healing of persons? Viewing the pastoral counseling process as

spiritual formation or sanctification is one way of understanding this theological core.

The third goal of the study is to recover an understanding of the pastoral counseling process as spiritual formation. In American society the process of spiritual formation and guidance has become psychologized. The field of pastoral care and counseling is a good example of this phenomenon. This shift in the culture highlights one of the key issues in contemporary pastoral counseling: what is the difference between the psychological goal of mental health and the theological goal of spiritual growth? As a consequence of the effects of modernity and secularization, the functions of psychological healing and spiritual guidance have become separated. The position of this study is that the overall container for human growth and wholeness is theological, the process of spiritual formation. Spiritual formation embraces the whole of life, including the aspect of psychological growth and healing.

The fourth goal is to explore the tradition of the prayer of the heart for its potential as a model for understanding the spiritual core of the pastoral counseling process. The assumption here is that the prayer of the heart is one model of spiritual formation, a method for deepening grace. By studying this particular model in depth, it should be possible to gain some insight into the nature of the spiritual formation process in general along with possible applications for pastoral counseling.

Finally, the fifth goal of the study is to demonstrate the value and relevance of the classical tradition of Christian spirituality as a rich source for developing models of pastoral care and counseling.

#### Sources

There are three main reasons for selecting the prayer of the heart as the primary source for this study. In the first place, the prayer of the heart provides an anthropology, an understanding of the human, that includes the spiritual dimension of human experience. Second, it offers a method of spiritual formation, of deepening grace, that is particularly compatible with the pastoral counseling process. In the third place, the prayer of the heart is a classic model of spiritual formation representing the richness of the historical tradition.

As a model of spiritual formation the prayer of the heart is inclusive, holistic, and integrative. It is inclusive in the sense that, in the prayer of the heart, there is no dichotomy between the head and the heart. Within Eastern Christian anthropology the heart is understood in an inclusive fashion. The prayer of the heart does not merely designate affective prayer in the Western sense. Rather, it refers to the prayer of the whole person. Henry Nouwen refers to the prayer of the heart as a "very holistic view of prayer."<sup>79</sup> The prayer of the heart is also

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<sup>79</sup> Henri Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart: Desert Spirituality and Contemporary Ministry* (New York: Seabury

an integrative model of spiritual formation. It is a method for the integration of the mind and the heart, for the unification of the personality.

While the understanding of the pastoral counseling process to be presented here primarily relies upon the prayer of the heart as its primary source, it also incorporates some references to modern depth psychology. Selected writings from Ann and Barry Ulanov are referred to here. Their perspective is of particular interest because it integrates Christian spirituality with depth psychology. The other source representing modern depth psychology mentioned here is object relations theory. This perspective has been chosen because of its understanding of the early stages of human development. Neither of these sources will be considered on an equal footing with the primary source, nor will they be discussed at any length. To do so would entail another study in itself.

Why depth psychology? Both the prayer of the heart and depth psychology provide methods for deepening human experience, ways in to human interiority. Depth psychology offers a powerful understanding of the psychological dimensions of human interiority and the deepening process. The prayer of the heart suggests an equally powerful model for understanding the spiritual dimensions of the deepening process.

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Press, 1981), 79.

## Definitions

Spirituality. The term spirituality as it will be used in this study refers to a fundamental dimension of the human being. It is an inclusive term, not meant to be limited to the Christian tradition. It is

that inner dimension of the person called by certain traditions 'the spirit.' This spiritual core is the deepest center of the person. It is here that the person is open to the transcendent dimension; it is here that the person experiences ultimate reality.<sup>80</sup>

This definition was selected both because of its recognition of the fundamental nature of the spiritual dimension of human experience and because of its compatibility with the prayer of the heart.

Grace. In this study grace refers to the hidden uncovering action of the Holy Spirit seeking one out in the depths of one's being. In the Eastern Christian tradition the Holy Spirit is seen as the principal and true author of sanctification, the maker of progress in the spiritual life. It will be argued here that spiritual formation or sanctification is essentially a process of being in a "school of love" or "learning to bear the beams of love." Both of these phrases will be explained in Chapter 4.

Prayer. In this study, prayer is understood as the process of consenting to the deepening movement of grace

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<sup>80</sup> Ewert Cousins, preface to the series, in *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, eds. Bernard McGinn, John Meyendorff, and Jean Leclercq, World Spirituality, vol. 16 (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1985), xiii.

within one. It is a response to the hidden uncovering action of the Holy Spirit seeking one out in the depths of one's being. Prayer is much more than an isolated act of petition. It is a process of spiritual formation, of deepening in grace.

Heart. As has been mentioned above, the meaning of the term heart in the tradition of the prayer of the heart is similar to what is meant by spirit. The heart refers to the inner person, the hidden part of the human being. It is the point of contact, the place of encounter between God and human beings. The heart is the ground of the soul. It is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. The heart is the deepest part of the person. It includes consciousness as well as the unconscious. It contains the intellect, the affect, and the imagination. It is the seat of consciousness and the moral center of the person. It is the principle of unity or connection within the human being. The heart is at the center of the person. It is through the heart that one enters into relationship with all of creation.

This concludes the discussion of the problem and the statement of the methodology to be employed in this study. The following chapter will address the question, What is the prayer of the heart? It will also include a presentation of an overview of the evolution of this tradition and the rationale underlying the selection of a primary text.

## CHAPTER 2

## The Evolution of the Prayer of the Heart

The prayer of the heart is a central theological tradition within Eastern Christian spirituality. The goal of this study will be to construct a model of pastoral counseling based on this tradition, which addresses the concerns raised in the previous chapter. The model to be presented will be fundamentally a theological model of pastoral counseling. It will be drawn primarily from historical sources. And, it will provide a method for connecting daily life with the depth dimension in human experience.

This chapter will address the question, What is the prayer of the heart, and what is its significance? An overview of the evolution of the prayer of the heart will be presented. The aim is to highlight some of the major stages in the development of this tradition, not to detail a complete history. The reason for including such an overview is to give the reader some idea of the nature of the prayer of the heart and to demonstrate its importance as a theological tradition. Finally, there will be a brief discussion of the primary source, *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart*, including a rationale for selecting this particular text, as well as its place in the literature.<sup>1</sup> This chapter lays the groundwork for Chapter 3

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<sup>1</sup> E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer. trans., *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), hereafter referred to as *Writings*.

in which the central theological elements of the prayer of the heart will be presented. In Chapter 4 a model of pastoral counseling will then be constructed on the basis of these elements.

### What Is the Prayer of the Heart and

#### What Is Its Significance?

The prayer of the heart is a method of prayer which has proved deeply influential in Eastern Christian spirituality. It has occupied such a pivotal place within the Orthodox Church that it has practically become identified with inner prayer. The prayer of the heart has significantly shaped the development of contemplative prayer in the Eastern Christian tradition. It is central and normative among expressions of Orthodox mysticism.

The significance of the prayer of the heart for the discipline of Christian spirituality and contemplative prayer is discernible in the many references to the prayer of the heart among contemporary Roman Catholic and Anglican writers.<sup>2</sup> The recent growth of the centering prayer movement has also called attention to the prayer of the heart. It is one of the methods recommended for use in centering prayer.<sup>3</sup>

Within the Orthodox Church this method of prayer is also called the Jesus Prayer. The Jesus Prayer has been

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<sup>2</sup> See Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen and Kenneth Leech.

<sup>3</sup> See Thayer, 82-104.



referred to as "the heart of orthodoxy."<sup>4</sup> Irene Hausherr, late professor at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome and a Western pioneer in teaching Eastern spirituality, summarizes the Jesus Prayer:

The Jesus Prayer is a prayer of contrition, a weapon against the attacks of demons, and a method for maintaining the continual remembrance of God. Its origin was in a monastic milieu, among athletes of the spiritual combat who stressed *penthos* and were dedicated to the search for God through continual prayer. The essence of the prayer is a continually repeated cry to the Lord from the heart of a man conscious of being a sinner.<sup>5</sup>

The term Jesus Prayer refers both to the tradition which evolved around the method of prayer as well as to the formula which came to be recited. The standard phrasing of the prayer runs: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me." Sometimes the words, "a sinner," are added after "have mercy on me." To the extent that the prayer of the heart and the Jesus Prayer each refer to the tradition of inner prayer which developed in the Christian East, the terms are virtually synonymous.

However, it is also possible to distinguish between the prayer of the heart and the Jesus Prayer because they stress different aspects of the tradition. The Jesus Prayer

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<sup>4</sup> See Tomas Spidlik, *The Spirituality of the Christian East: A Systematic Handbook*, trans. Anthony P. Gythiel, Cistercian Studies Series, no. 77 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Pub., 1986), 316-17.

<sup>5</sup> Irene Hausherr, *The Name of Jesus*, trans. Charles Cummings, Cistercian Studies Series, no. 44 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Pub., 1978), 265.

emphasizes devotion to the name of Jesus and the use of the prayer formula. Whereas, the prayer of the heart stresses the notion of mind-in-heart prayer which has been so paramount in the Orthodox doctrine of prayer. In this study the decision was made to refer to the tradition as the prayer of the heart, making the idea of mind-in-heart prayer central.

What, then, is the appeal of the prayer of the heart?

It is a powerful method of contemplative prayer. Contemplation, from this perspective, is an interior movement of the heart. The heart is viewed as the deepest level of human awareness. It is the center of the person as well as the place of encounter with the divine. Entering into the heart signifies the journey inward, the recovery of the self as the image of God.

The prayer of the heart is a holistic as well as an integrative method of prayer. It is a prayer of the whole person: body, emotions, intellect and spirit. The heart includes the unconscious as well as consciousness. The prayer of the heart is a process of integration wherein the disordered passions or emotions are healed. Inner conflict, or spiritual warfare as it is termed by the fathers, is a central aspect of this method of prayer. The journey inward involves confronting and dismantling the false self. This is the cleansing or purgative function of prayer. The goal is purity or singleness of heart.

Another aspect of the appeal of the prayer of the heart

is that it contains a framework for the spiritual life. The life of prayer is seen as a sacred journey which includes progressive stages of growth and development. There is a real place for human effort. Progress only comes as a result of hard work and much struggle. Asceticism is indispensable in the life of prayer. At the same time, it is never forgotten that true prayer is a gift of grace, and that it is finally the Holy Spirit who is the maker of human progress.

Finally, the prayer of the heart provides a method for fulfilling the injunction to pray always. The end of the prayer of the heart is the attainment of the state of continual prayer. This is the stage of the integration of prayer with daily life. There is no separation between prayer and life. All of life becomes a prayer.

This notion of continual prayer points to the mystical dimension of the prayer of the heart. Continuous prayer is the state of union with the divine. It is no longer we who are praying; rather, it is the Holy Spirit who prays in us. We have become one with our prayer. The goal of contemplation is experimental knowledge of God, the experience of union.

#### An Overview of the Development of the Prayer of the Heart

The central theological elements of the prayer of the heart upon which the model to be constructed is based did not spring out of nowhere. Neither are they the product of

a single author. The prayer of the heart is a theological tradition which has evolved over centuries. As noted above, it is beyond the scope of this study to attempt an exhaustive history of the development of the prayer of the heart. Rather, the aim in this section is to sketch an overview of the key stages in the evolution of this tradition as a backdrop for the presentation of the central elements which is to follow in the next chapter.

The primary source from which these key theological elements are drawn is the volume *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart*. *Writings* is a selection of spiritual teachings on the prayer of the heart by a variety of authors from different historical periods. The selections are not systematic treatises on the prayer of the heart. Rather, they are a collection of practical instructions by spiritual masters intended for the edification of their followers. The authors freely quote from the teachings of the fathers, assuming that the reader is familiar with this tradition. Without some knowledge of the main themes and how they developed, much of the sense of the text is lost.

For the purposes of this study the major stages in the development of the prayer of the heart will be presented in five sections. The first stage goes back to desert spirituality, the birthplace of the prayer of the heart. The second stage is concerned with the intellectual and the affective roots of the prayer of the heart in the writings

of Evagrius and the Macarian *Homilies*. The third stage focuses on the coming together of the main elements of the prayer of the heart and the arrival at a fixed formula of the prayer. The fourth stage centers on the fourteenth century and how the prayer of the heart became the dominant method of prayer in Eastern Christian monasticism. The fifth stage is the golden age of the prayer of the heart: the publication of the *Philokalia* and the spread of the tradition. Finally, there will be a brief discussion of the reasons behind the selection of *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart* as a primary text.

It should be noted that in the following description of the major stages in the evolution of the prayer of the heart more space is devoted to developments prior to the fifteenth century. This is because the writers included in the primary source all come before this time.

#### Desert Spirituality: Birthplace of the Prayer of the Heart

While the elements of the prayer of the heart date back to the fifth century, its roots go back to the flowering of desert spirituality and the rise of monasticism in the fourth century. The wisdom of the desert flows through the tradition of the prayer of the heart like an underground river.

The period of the desert spirituality movement is a time of immense importance for the prayer of the heart. Later writers in this tradition considered themselves to be

the spiritual heirs of the early desert fathers. They were familiar with the teachings of the fathers and frequently quoted from their writings. Many of the central themes of the prayer of the heart can be traced back to the desert fathers.

The desert spirituality movement largely began in response to a key historical event, the Emperor Constantine's victory in 323. Previously, during the time of the persecutions, martyrdom was the ideal of the Christian life. Martyrs were the "athletes" of the spiritual life, engaging in combat with the powers of evil represented by the state and its idolatrous demands. When Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire all of this changed. Asceticism became the new ideal of the Christian life. Monasticism was the primary setting in which this new ideal was lived out.

The monastic impulse was born out of the desire to live a life of prayer. The early monks were adventurers in the life of the spirit. Primitive monasticism was a time of diversity of practice, as well as a time of experiment and competition in forms. It was only later that monasticism became institutionalized.

The tradition of the prayer of the heart is closely linked with the growth of monasticism in the Christian East. Monastic life formed the container within which the prayer of the heart evolved. Monasticism played a significant role in the development of the prayer of the heart because, until

the end of the nineteenth century, the practice of this method of prayer was, for the most part, limited to monks.

The early monks saw the desert as the ideal setting for the ascetical life. Monasticism was not simply living an ascetical life, but practicing the ascetical life separated from the world. There were cenobitical as well as eremitical forms of monasticism, although the eremitical life was given preference in the East.

One of the themes which emerged in desert spirituality and which later became one of the fundamental characteristics of Eastern Christian theology and, hence, the prayer of the heart, is apophatism, or the tradition of negative theology. Whereas kataphatic or positive theology approaches the problem of the knowledge of God by way of affirmations, apophatic or negative theology proceeds by way of negations. Desert spirituality was not the only influence on the development of apophatism in Eastern Christian theology. As will be seen, the Evagrian notion of pure prayer as the putting away of all thoughts was also a key factor.

However, desert spirituality exercised a powerful effect on this aspect of Eastern Christian theology. Orthodox scholar Kallistos Ware identifies the emergence of the way of negation in Eastern Christian spirituality with the flight to the desert. Jesuit scholar and authority on Eastern Christian studies George A. Maloney refers to

apophatism as "the dark, inner desert."<sup>6</sup> Roman Catholic theologian and Trappist monk Thomas Merton identifies the prayer of the heart with contemplative prayer. He also draws a connection between the apophatic tradition, desert spirituality and contemplative prayer. Merton speaks of "the 'desert' of contemplation,"<sup>7</sup> and characterizes contemplative prayer as "simply the preference for the desert."<sup>8</sup> The desert fathers explored the unknown inner abyss; they were the experts of their time on the depth dimension in human experience. This emphasis on choosing the dark forms part of the backdrop of the prayer of the heart.

The Intellectual and the Affective Roots  
of the Prayer of the Heart

In the later fourth century two specific "currents" emerged in Eastern Christian spirituality.<sup>9</sup> These currents are represented by Evagrius Ponticus and "Macarius," the author of the *Fifty Spiritual Homilies*. It is in their writings that the origins of the prayer of the heart can first be discerned.

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<sup>6</sup> George A. Maloney, *Prayer of the Heart* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1981), 157.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, foreword by Douglas V. Steere (New York: Image Books, 1971), 92.

<sup>8</sup> Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, 89.

<sup>9</sup> See Kallistos Ware, introduction to "The Eastern Fathers," in *The Study of Spirituality*, eds. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright and Edward Yarnold (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986), 160.



Evagrius: a spirituality of the intellect. Evagrius was born in Pontus in 345. As a young man he came under the influence of St. Basil and joined the monastic movement. However, he was more attracted by the intellectual life of Constantinople where he went to live. Here he became close friends with Gregory Nazianzen and, later, Gregory of Nyssa. Following a personal crisis, he went to Jerusalem where he met Melania the Elder and Rufinus, both of whom were to remain lifelong friends. All three were Origenists. Evagrius then settled in Nitria in the Egyptian desert where he lived the life of an ascetic. He died at the age of 55 in 399. Evagrius was condemned, along with Origen, at the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553. As a consequence, his writings were destroyed in the original Greek version. However, they were preserved in Syriac translations.

In contrast to the evangelical and practical emphasis of the early desert fathers, Evagrius belongs to the intellectualist tradition of monasticism. He has been called "the philosopher-monk *par excellence*."<sup>10</sup> Evagrius was deeply influenced by Origen, whose spirituality borrowed extensively from the metaphysics and anthropology of Neoplatonism.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Hausherr, *Name of Jesus*, 146.

<sup>11</sup> Within the Neoplatonic framework which forms the basis of Evagrius' treatment of prayer, the emphasis is on the intellect or the mind, the *nous*. It is important to recall the usage of the Greek word *nous* in order to comprehend what Evagrius means by the term. At that time *nous* was used in a pre-Cartesian sense, meaning a

Evagrius' importance lies in his integration of erudite spirituality with the ascetic tradition of the desert fathers. He added to the Origenist tradition a practical concern which arose out of his own life experience as a monk. This practical concern balances the intellectual side of his writings.

Evagrius' chief contribution was his development of a systematized account of the spiritual life. The Evagrian schema exercised a significant influence upon the Latin monastic tradition as well as Eastern Christian monasticism. Many of the most important Byzantine theologians incorporated Evagrian concepts into their own teachings. These writers include Maximus the Confessor, St. Diadochus of Photice, St. John Climachus, Hesychius, and St. Symeon the New Theologian. Evagrius' thought also influenced the hesychastic school of spirituality through the teachings of St. Gregory of Sinai. As will be seen, primary resources such as the *Philokalia* draw on the contributions made by all of these authors to understanding the prayer of the heart.

There are two main areas where Evagrius' schema

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contemplative form of thought, an intuitive grasp. Intellect or mind was not limited to discursive reason. The *nous* was seen as the faculty of direct knowledge of God. Prayer was understood as the supreme activity of the mind or intellect. See Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), xv-xvi. See also Kallistos Ware, "Ways of Prayer and Contemplation: Eastern," in *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, eds. Bernard McGinn, John Meyendorff, and Jean Leclercq, World Spirituality, vol. 16 (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1988), 400.

significantly influenced the development of the prayer of the heart. The first is his account of the spiritual progress of the soul. This is found in the *Praktikos*, his best known work on the ascetic life. The "One Hundred Chapters" of the *Praktikos* is one of the major selections contained in the *Philokalia*. The second is his formulation of prayer and contemplation, found in the *Chapters on Prayer*.

The three stages of the soul's progress in the spiritual life, according to Evagrius, are *praktike*, *physike* and *theoria*, also termed *theologia*, theology, or *gnosis*, spiritual knowledge. *Praktike* refers to the ascetic life. It begins with conversion, *metanoia*. The ascetic life consists of acquiring the virtues, struggling with the demons, overcoming temptations and subduing the passions. Evagrius defines *praktike*, or the ascetic life, as "the spiritual method for cleansing the affective part of the soul."<sup>12</sup> The chief obstacles to pure prayer, the final goal of the spiritual life, are thoughts, passions and the imagination. The goal of *praktike* is *apatheia*, "dispassion" or "freedom from passion."

Evagrius knew first hand the struggles of the interior life. He was one of the greatest psychologists among the desert fathers. In his writings he suggests a link between

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<sup>12</sup> Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos; and Chapters on Prayer*, trans., with an introduction and notes by John Eudes Bamberger, Cistercian Studies Series, no. 4 (Spencer, Mass.: Cistercian Pub., 1970), 36.

psychic images and the emotions. John E. Bamberger, Cistercian monk, orientalist and psychiatrist, comments that the method of observation employed by Evagrius in his analysis of the passions resembles dynamic psychoanalysis in "its emphasis on careful observations upon one's most interior and spontaneous thoughts."<sup>13</sup> For Evagrius, this discipline was a form of searching for God.

Evagrius' analysis of the passions is closely linked to his account of the role of the demons in the ascetic life. In the early church the ascetic life was largely seen as a war against demons. The theme of spiritual combat is also prominent in the teachings of the desert fathers. To this tradition Evagrius added his profound psychological insights. The demons influence human beings through the passions, or disordered impulses. This is the reason why Evagrius devotes so much attention to an analysis of the passions. Evagrius' description of the eight *logismoi*, or passionate thoughts, is a classic account. It was later adapted to make up the familiar list of the seven deadly sins.

What is truly remarkable about Evagrius is his insight into the significance of the analysis of the passions for the life of prayer. Cleansing the heart of the passions is an essential first step in the ascent to contemplation, or pure prayer. The process of purification proceeds from the

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<sup>13</sup> Bamberger, introduction to Evagrius Ponticus, *Praktikos*, 9.

exterior to the interior, into the depths of the human spirit. The Evagrian schema goes beyond modern depth psychology in presupposing that the deepest part of the human being is not psychological, but spiritual. The core of the human being is the image of God.

Within the Evagrian schema the goal of *praxis* is *apatheia*, dispassion. *Apatheia* is not meant negatively as in the modern sense of apathy. It has a positive meaning referring to the state of reintegration, a restoration of the healthy functioning of the soul brought about through the transformation of the passions. The result is a deep and abiding calm, also termed purity of heart or the intellect. Purification of the intellect is a precondition for contemplation. The method of purification is very strict. It requires that the intellect be stripped of all passionate movement, including the imagination, as well as all multiplicity of concepts. It is a state of nakedness and simplicity.

Thus, the goal of the ascetical life, far from the mutilation of the self, is the purification or restoration of the image of God in the human being. *Apatheia* presumes the reintegration of the disordered passions; it is the health of the soul.<sup>14</sup> However, *apatheia* alone is not sufficient for complete health. What might be termed psychological health or wholeness today is not the same

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<sup>14</sup> See Bamberger, introduction to *Praktikos*; and *Chapters on Prayer*, lxxxviii.

thing as salvation. Contemplation, experiential knowledge of God, is the way of perfection. *Apatheia* is not an end in itself, however. Rather, it gives birth to *agape*, love. It is love that leads to the second stage, *physike*.<sup>15</sup>

*Physike* is the first degree of contemplation, the contemplation of God in creation. The assumption is that there is a moral dimension which can be discerned in the structured order of the universe. At this level of contemplation one derives knowledge of the attributes of God, rather than knowledge of God's nature. Thus, *physike* represents an intermediate stage of contemplation. It is an inferior degree because one does not achieve complete simplicity of thought, but remains in a state of multiplicity. Evagrius contrasts lower contemplation with higher contemplation. Whereas *physike* is characterized by effort and struggle, *theologia*, or *theoria*, is marked by a sense of peace and calm.

*Theologia*, or theology, is the higher degree of contemplation. Higher contemplation results in simple, intuitive (or experimental) knowledge of God. Contemplation, "pure prayer," is "the putting away of all thoughts." It is a state beyond all concepts and ideas, beyond all multiplicity. It presupposes total simplicity

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<sup>15</sup> One critique of the Evagrian schema is that *agape*, or love, is set on a lower stage than *gnosis*, knowledge or contemplation. However, as will be seen in the next chapter, this weakness is overcome in the synthesis of intellect and heart in the prayer of the heart.

and complete nakedness of the intellect. The emphasis is on the transcendence of the divine. The Evagrian conception of pure prayer is fundamentally apophatic: "True knowledge is an infinite ignorance."<sup>16</sup>

Evagrius made a key contribution to the theology and practice of prayer in Eastern Christianity and the prayer of the heart. The significance of Evagrius' thought lies in his identification of the highest form of contemplation with the state of pure prayer.<sup>17</sup> The Christian life is seen as the life of prayer; prayer and contemplation are inseparably linked with the monastic life.

The last two stages, *physike* and *theologia*, are often condensed into one, designated as *theoria*, or contemplation. Thus, the spiritual journey is divided into two stages: the active life (*praxis*) and the contemplative life (*theoria*). It is important to remember that this usage differs significantly from the modern usage. Today the active life is understood more in terms of ministry in the world, whereas the contemplative life is viewed as a life of prayer in a setting removed from the world. Within the tradition of the prayer of the heart the active life refers to the process of acquiring the virtues and mastering the passions, whereas the contemplative life is the stage of union with God in the state of pure prayer.

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<sup>16</sup> Bamberger, introduction to *Chapters on Prayer*, 48.

<sup>17</sup> See Bamberger, introduction to *Praktikos*; and *Chapters on Prayer*, xcii.

"Macarius": a spirituality of the heart. There is disagreement about the identity of the author of the *Homilies*, but he is generally believed to have lived between the mid-fourth to the mid-fifth centuries, within the monasticism of Mesopotamia or Asia Minor. A whole literature has been attributed to Macarius, the fifty *Homilies* being the most important part of this body. Macarius has been identified with the Messalian sect, a monastic movement in Syria at the end of the fourth century. However, there are many questions concerning the extent of the author's association with this group. The central message of Messalianism is that the only thing that matters is prayer. Critics accused the movement of devaluing the sacraments and overemphasizing the importance of feelings and visions. Even though Messalianism was eventually condemned as a heresy, the *Homilies* were preserved within the Eastern Church for the value of their spiritual teaching.

The fifty *Homilies* of Macarius are written in the manner of conversations between a spiritual father and his followers, where the master answers questions concerning the life of prayer. This was a literary genre common among the desert fathers and was to remain popular within Eastern Christian spirituality.

The writings of Macarius, primarily the *Homilies*, constitute the second current to emerge in Eastern Christian spirituality in the later fourth century. In contrast to



the intellectual spirituality of Evagrius which can be characterized as a spirituality of the mind or *nous*, the spirituality of the Macarian *Homilies* can be categorized as a spirituality of the heart or *kardia*. Just as the term *nous* in the Evagrian schema is not limited to reason or discursive thinking, so the term *kardia* in the *Homilies* does not solely refer to the affections or the emotions. Some of the central themes from the *Homilies* include: the metaphor of the heart, the experience of grace, a stress on the serious effect of the fall on human beings, the coexistence of sin and grace, perseverance in prayer, the progressive character of the spiritual life, and the mysticism of light.

The metaphor of the heart occupies a central place in the *Homilies*. The heart is seen as the moral and spiritual center of the human being, the true self created in the image of God. The heart includes the whole person: body, emotions, imagination, intellect and will. It includes all human faculties and all activities. It is the principle of integration. There is no dichotomy between head and heart, because the mind is within the heart. Thus, within Eastern Christian spirituality the prayer of the heart is not limited to affective prayer. Rather, this method of prayer is a prayer of the whole person.

The heart is understood as the deepest level of consciousness; it is the center of consciousness and the unconscious. The deep heart of the Psalms is the ground of the soul and the seat of God: "There are unfathomable depths

within the heart. God is there with the angels, light and life are there, the kingdom and the apostles, the heavenly cities, and the treasures of grace, all things are there."<sup>18</sup>

In contrast to the intellectual emphasis found in the writings of Evagrius, the spirituality of the *Homilies* is deeply experiential. Within the Messalian sect particular importance was placed on the conscious experience of grace as the beginning of prayer. Closely allied to this experience is the sense of assurance that the advent of grace brings with it. What matters is inner experience, inner assurance. The effect of grace is inward, a sense of the presence of grace in the depths of the heart. This emphasis on conscious awareness of being in the state of grace led the Messalians to discount the importance of baptism and to disregard the possibility of divine activity not present to consciousness. For this stance they were condemned: "from the instant we are baptized, grace is hidden in the depths of the intellect, concealing its presence from the perception of the intellect itself."<sup>19</sup>

The *Homilies* place great stress on the serious effect of sin on human beings. This emphasis is combined with a strong doctrine of the fall. Baptism, in principle, does not rid us of sin; sin is far more radical and persistent than believed. Fallen human beings have lost the image and

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<sup>18</sup> Macarius, cited in Leech, *Soul Friend*, 136.

<sup>19</sup> Diadochus, "On Spiritual Knowledge," in *The Philokalia*, vol. 1 (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 279.

likeness to God, and sin has entered into the heart. Sin is mixed, or mingled, in the heart. The analogy of mingling is prominent in the *Homilies*. Both sin and grace are mingled in the heart.

For the heart commands and rules the whole body. And grace, once it has taken possession of the pastures of the heart, reigns over all our members and all our thoughts. For there, in the heart, is the spirit (*nous*), and all the thoughts of the soul and its hope. Through it grace passes into all the members of the body. Equally with those that are children of darkness: sin reigns over their heart and passes into all their members.<sup>20</sup>

The role of the demons is understood within this context: we are not our own.

Perseverance in prayer is another key theme in the *Homilies*. Following baptism, sin and grace coexist in human beings. Sin cannot be rooted out by human effort. Only grace can counter the effects of sin. Therefore, one must persevere in prayer. Grace comes through prayer. However, even after the coming of grace, sin still exists in the soul; hence, the need for perseverance in prayer. The chief thing one can do, without which all else--including the sacraments--is worthless, is to pray: "Perseverance in prayer: that is the greatest of all good exertions and the chief of good actions."<sup>21</sup>

The notion of progress in the spiritual life is also an

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<sup>20</sup> Macarius, cited in Louis Bouyer, *The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers*, trans. Mary P. Ryan, A History of Christian Sprituality, vol. 1 (New York: Seabury Press, 1963), 378.

<sup>21</sup> Macarius, cited in Louth, 119.

important theme in the *Homilies*. Perfection in prayer requires a long process of growth. Baptism restores the "image of perfection" in human beings. However, maturing in perfection is a lifelong process. Hence, progress must be incessant. The life of prayer is a life of unceasing struggle. Yet, it is vital to remember the essential tenet of asceticism: it is the Holy Spirit who is the maker of our progress. Prayer and spiritual disciplines are merely the means of opening to grace. This process of perfection is understood as a descent into the depths, the inner abyss of the heart.

As men in the trade go naked into the depths of the sea, into the watery death, to find those pearls that will do for a royal crown, and purple dye, so those who live the monastic life go naked out of the world, and go down into the sea of evil and into the gulf of darkness, and from these depths they take and bring up precious stones suitable for the crown of Christ, for the heavenly Church, for a new world, and a city of light, and people of angels.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, the experience of grace is manifest in a mysticism of light found in the *Homilies*.

The soul that has been deemed worthy by the Spirit to participate in His light and that has been illumined by the splendour of His ineffable glory, when He has prepared it to become the throne of His glory, becomes wholly light, wholly face, wholly eyes, and there remains no further part of itself that is not filled with the spiritual eyes of light. . . . so the soul, that has been fully illumined by the ineffable beauty of the glory of the light of the face of Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit, worthy to become the dwelling and the temple of God, is wholly eye, wholly light, wholly face, wholly glory and wholly spirit,

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<sup>22</sup> Marcarius, cited in Louth, 125.

Christ in this way adorning it, carrying it, directing it, sustaining it and leading it and so illuminating it and decorating it with spiritual beauty.<sup>23</sup>

Perfection in prayer is rarely reached in this life. It is a state of rapture. Perfection presupposes a kinship between the soul and God. Union between the soul and God, the goal of prayer, is not something natural to the soul, but is granted to it through grace.

As will be seen in the sections which follow, various writers on the prayer of the heart select and discard different aspects of the teachings of Evagrius and Macarius. The authors integrate these elements, along with their own unique perspective, into a creative theological synthesis which adds to the richness of the developing tradition.

#### A Fixed Formula: The Coming Together of the Main Elements of the Prayer of the Heart

From the fifth century onwards there was a growing convergence of the Evagrian and the Macarian currents in Eastern Christian spirituality. It is in the convergence of these currents that the origins of the prayer of the heart, or the Jesus Prayer, can first be discerned. The prayer of the heart emerged as a method of prayer between the fifth and the eighth centuries. Yet, it was not just a method of prayer. A whole spirituality eventually grew up around it.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Macarius, cited in Bouyer, 373-74.

<sup>24</sup> See Kallistos Ware, "The Origins of the Jesus Prayer: Diadochus, Gaza, Sinai," in Jones, Wainwright and

The prayer of the heart is comprised of four main elements. The first element is devotion to the name of Jesus. The prayer itself is addressed to Jesus. He is given several titles such as the Christ, Lord and Savior. The prayer is accompanied by a strong sense of compunction and inward grief for sin, or *penthos*. It includes a plea for mercy along with the knowledge that one is a sinner. This is the second element. The third element is the use of short phrases, frequently repeated, as a means of attaining continual prayer. The fourth element is the quest for inner silence or stillness, *hesuchia*, what Kallistos Ware terms "imageless, non-discursive prayer."<sup>25</sup> The last three elements can all be detected in monastic sources from fourth-century Egypt.

The second element, the notion of compunction, is a key theme in desert spirituality. The *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* assign a central place to *penthos*. Some of the earliest prayer formulas were pleas for help. These were gradually replaced by the *eleison* formula, "Lord have mercy," which eventually dominated after the thirteenth or fourteenth century. Hausherr argues that the underlying motive for this emphasis on compunction was the desire for constant prayer. For the monks the attitude of *penthos* was

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Yarnold, 175-84.

<sup>25</sup> Ware, "Origins of the Jesus Prayer," 176.

the most effective means to continual prayer.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the prayer of the heart is both a petition for mercy and a prayer of contrition.

The third element, the use of short prayers, frequently repeated, is also emphasized in the *Sayings*. From the time of John Climacus the repetition of short phrases was known as monologic prayer, from *monologistos*, or "a prayer of one word." The early monks employed this type of prayer in their meditation. They recited verses from scripture, especially the Psalms, which they learned by heart. The use of short prayers was an aid in the struggle against harmful thoughts. It was also a method for maintaining "remembrance of God" during daily activities, as well as in sleep.

Evidence for the fourth element, imageless, non-discursive prayer, is also found in early monastic Egypt, primarily in the writings of Evagrius. His understanding of pure prayer as the putting away of all thoughts, where the goal of the ascetical life is for the intellect to become simple and naked, significantly influenced the development of the prayer of the heart. However, this element, non-discursive or apophatic prayer, had not yet become linked with the practice of frequent repetition.

As of the fourth century no special prominence was given to the name of Jesus as a prayer formula. A variety

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<sup>26</sup> See Hausherr, *Name of Jesus*, 121. For more on *penthos* see also Irene Hausherr, *Penthos: The Doctrine of Compunction in the Christian East*, Cistercian Studies Series, no. 53 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Pub., 1982).

of formulas were being used at that time. Thus, the true beginnings of a distinctive spirituality of the prayer of the heart lie in the fifth century.

Several scholars trace the origins of the prayer of the heart back to St. Diadochus, bishop of Photice in northern Greece.<sup>27</sup> Although *penthos* did not occupy a central place in his writings, Diadochus did establish an explicit connection between the other three elements. He treated the invocation of the name of Jesus as a way of maintaining the memory of God and, also, as a means of entry into the state of pure prayer. Diadochus was influenced both by Evagrius and the *Homilies*. He combined the Evagrian understanding of prayer as the putting away of all thoughts with the affective emphasis of the *Homilies* and their insistence upon the spiritual senses, upon feelings and conscious experience. However, Diadochus opposed the more extreme Messalian views.

Nowhere in his writings does Diadochus employ the classic formula of the Jesus Prayer. However, he is a witness to an intermediate stage in the evolution towards a fixed formula. With Diadochus the diversity of monologic prayer found in fourth century Egypt has given way to greater uniformity. He represents a decisive step forward in that he recommends the discipline of frequent repetition, using the name of Jesus as a focal point, as a practical

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<sup>27</sup> See Ware, "Origins of the Jesus Prayer," 177-79. See also Hausherr, *Name of Jesus*, 228-29.



method for attaining the state of pure prayer.<sup>28</sup>

The classical formulation of the Jesus Prayer emerged between the sixth through the eighth centuries. Several figures play a prominent role in this development.

Dorotheus, who was a disciple of Saints Barsanuphius and John, founded his own monastery near Gaza in 540.<sup>29</sup> He was more open to the influence of Evagrius than were Barsanuphius and John. Dorotheus is the author of the *Life of Dositheus*. In it he recommends the invocation of the name of Jesus as a means of achieving unceasing remembrance of God. Like Evagrius, Dorotheus views continual prayer as an implicit state of being. The first historical evidence of the coalescence of the element of *penthos* with the invocation of the name of Jesus is found in the *Life of Dositheus*.<sup>30</sup>

The standard form of the Jesus Prayer is first found in the *Life of Abba Philemon*.<sup>31</sup> Little is known about

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<sup>28</sup> See Ware, "Origins of the Jesus Prayer," 179.

<sup>29</sup> St. Barsanuphius and St. John, otherwise known as the two Old Men of Gaza, were hermits who lived in the sixth century. They settled outside a monastery near Gaza where they became well known as spiritual guides. They followed in the pragmatic tradition of the *Sayings* as opposed to the more speculative, platonizing line of Evagrius. A selection from their teachings is included in *Writings*. See Barsanuphius and John, "Directions in Spiritual Work," 346-81.

<sup>30</sup> See Hausherr, *Name of Jesus*, 267.

<sup>31</sup> The *Life of Abba Philemon* is one of the selections contained in the *Philokalia*. For more on his teachings, see Philemon, "The Most Profitable Narrative of Abba Philemon," in *Writings*, 402-16.

Philemon, except that he was an Egyptian monk who perhaps lived in the sixth century, possibly later. Philemon was influenced by Evagrius and the *Sayings*; however, Diadochus was his main authority. In his teaching on the Jesus Prayer he uses the phrase "praying with the heart." He sees the Jesus Prayer as an aid in maintaining remembrance of God, combating distractions and temptations, purifying the intellect, and making progress towards continual prayer. What is new with Philemon and what marks a new stage in the evolution of the Jesus Prayer is the exclusive use of one formula.

The next stage in the evolution of the prayer of the heart centers on three writers who are associated with Sinai: St. John Climacus (seventh century), and his two followers St. Hesychius (eighth-ninth century?) and St. Philotheus (ninth-tenth century?).<sup>32</sup> Sinai plays the role of transmitting the prayer of the heart rather than originating it, as once was thought. All three link the invocation of the name of Jesus with the breath.

St. John Climacus is best known for his work *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, a guide to monastic spirituality which still enjoys popularity today. Most of the *Ladder* is concerned with the ascetic life; however, there are several

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<sup>32</sup> St. Philotheus is known primarily for his recommendation of the use of the Jesus Prayer as a means of "gathering together" the fragmented self. For more on his teachings, see Philotheus of Sinai, "Forty Texts on Sobriety," in *Writings*, 323-40.

references to the Jesus Prayer. Climacus is the first Greek writer to use the term Jesus Prayer. He sees it as an effective weapon against the demons: "Whip your enemies with the name of Jesus, for there is no weapon more powerful in heaven or on earth."<sup>33</sup> Climacus connects the Jesus Prayer with stillness. Invocation of the name is a means of entry into the inner silence of the heart. It is a way of attaining pure prayer: "When you unite the memory of Jesus with your breathing, then you will know the benefits of *hesuchia*."<sup>34</sup>

Hesychius, who lived after Climacus, whom he quoted, was an abbot from Mt. Sinai. His work has been erroneously attributed to Hesychius of Jerusalem.<sup>35</sup> References to the prayer of the heart dominate his chief work, *On Watchfulness and Holiness*. The central theme here is "watchfulness," or "sobriety," *nepsis* in Greek. The term means vigilance, attentiveness, custody of the intellect, guarding the heart. The most effective way of maintaining watchfulness is to call upon Jesus. Hesychius stresses that the invocation is to be continuous--as much as possible. It is to be without thoughts or the use of the imagination. The continual

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<sup>33</sup> Climacus, cited in Hausherr, *Name of Jesus*, 280.

<sup>34</sup> Climacus, cited in Hausherr, *Name of Jesus*, 281.

<sup>35</sup> The selection from Hesychius appearing in *Writings*, entitled "Texts on Sobriety and Prayer, for the saving of the soul," is, in fact, wrongly ascribed to Hesychius of Jerusalem. See Hesychius of Jerusalem, "Texts on Sobriety and Prayer," in *Writings*, 279-321.

invocation of the name of Jesus without thoughts or images is the path of ascent to pure prayer in the Evagrian sense.

Hesychius marks several key developments in the evolution of the Jesus Prayer. In his teachings the concept of *nepsis* has replaced the traditional vocabulary of asceticism: the Evagrian formula defining *praktike* as the spiritual method for cleansing the affective part of the soul has now been applied to *nepsis*. Hesychius also signals an important stage in the process of restricting freedom of choice in prayer formulas. Climacus was the last to speak of several different short prayers. With Hesychius, the evolution towards a fixed formula of the Jesus Prayer has been accomplished.

While the prayer of the heart was to exercise a significant influence upon later Byzantine spirituality, there are only scattered references to it in the early period. By the middle of the eleventh century there is no reason to suppose that its use was universal or even widespread. It was not yet known at Mt. Athos. The prayer of the heart did not enjoy considerable popularity until the fourteenth century, and even then it was limited to select monastic centers.

Two important transitional figures prepared the way for the next major stage in the development of the prayer of the heart. They are Symeon the New Theologian and Nicephorus the Hesychast.

St. Symeon the New Theologian was a mystical theologian

from the eleventh century.<sup>36</sup> He balances the Evagrian framework with the more affective emphasis of Diadochus and Macarius. His writings resemble the *Homilies* in their stress upon conscious awareness of grace and direct, personal experience of God. Symeon exercised a significant influence upon the fourteenth-century Hesychasts.

Nicephorus the Hesychast was a monk who lived on Mt. Athos during the late thirteenth century.<sup>37</sup> His major work is *On Vigilance and the Guarding of the Heart*. His teachings represent an important stage in the evolution of the prayer of the heart for two reasons. First, Nicephorus links the formula of the Jesus Prayer with the physical technique. Second, with Nicephorus the notion of custody of the heart assumes center stage as *the method par excellence* leading to the union of the mind and heart.

Just what is the physical technique? References to a method connecting the Jesus Prayer to the rhythm of breathing can be found in earlier writers such as Climacus and Hesychius. However, the first systematic description of such a method in Greek sources can be traced back to

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<sup>36</sup> Selections from his teachings are included in *Writings*. See Symeon the New Theologian, "Practical and Theological Precepts," 97-142; "On Faith," 143-52; and "Three methods of attention and prayer," 152-61. Please note that while most scholars refer to him as Symeon the New Theologian, in *Writings* he is referred to as Simeon the New Theologian.

<sup>37</sup> A selection from Nicephorus is included in *Writings*. See Nicephorus of Mt. Athos, "A Most Profitable Discourse on Sobriety and the Guarding of the Heart," 22-34.

Nicephorus. There is a similar account in a work thought to be written by Symeon the New Theologian, entitled the *Method of Holy Prayer and Attentiveness*.<sup>38</sup> It is now generally agreed that Symeon is not the author. There is some possibility that Nicephorus wrote this piece.<sup>39</sup>

There are three main features of the physical technique. In the first place, a particular bodily posture is adopted. Secondly, the rhythm of breathing is slowed down. The third element involves searching inwardly for the place of the heart. The physical technique, when combined with the words of the prayer, helps keep guard over the heart. The aim is to acquire the state of inner stillness and simplicity which leads to pure prayer.

The writings of Nicephorus call attention to another significant stage in the development of the prayer of the heart. The notion of maintaining custody of the heart comes to the forefront. Nicephorus follows Hesychius in applying the Evagrian definition of *praxis*, the method for purifying the emotions, to *nepsis*, custody of the heart. Custody of the heart is a method which leads to the goal of the active life, purity of heart. The essence of the method involves leading the mind into the heart and keeping it there--in a

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<sup>38</sup> A selection from this work appears in *Writings* under the heading of "Three Methods of Attention and Prayer." It is erroneously attributed to St. Symeon the New Theologian.

<sup>39</sup> See Kallistos Ware, "The Hesychasts: Gregory of Sinai, Gregory Palamas and Nicolas Cabasilas," in Jones, Wainwright and Yarnold, 244.

state of pure prayer without thoughts or images. This is the essence of mind-in-heart prayer. The goal is union of mind and heart.

*On Vigilance and the Guarding of the Heart* contains fourteen selections from the writings of the fathers, all of whom Nicephorus considers to be witnesses to the prayer of the heart. Nicephorus quotes Macarius the Great, applying his classic definition of the ascetical life to *nepsis*: "The chief task of the athlete [that is, the monk] is to enter into his heart."<sup>40</sup> Nicephorus also refers to *The Ladder* in support of *nepsis*: "Just as thieves think twice about breaking into a place when they see signs that a strong warrior is inside, in the same way the invisible robbers are not likely to attack a man who has united his prayer to his heart."<sup>41</sup>

A close connection exists between the new method of maintaining custody of the heart and the old formula of the Jesus prayer. The Jesus Prayer functions as the primary method of guarding the heart. The coming together of the new method and the old formula marks a high point in the evolution of the prayer of the heart. From this time on the Jesus Prayer assumed dominance over all other prayer formulas.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Hausherr, *Name of Jesus*, 313.

<sup>41</sup> John Climacus, cited in Hausherr, *Name of Jesus*, 313.

<sup>42</sup> See Hausherr, *Name of Jesus*, 317.

The immediate influence of Nicephorus was limited, however.<sup>43</sup> His writings did not assume prominence until after his lifetime.

Fourteenth-Century Hesychasm: The Dominance  
of the Prayer of the Heart

As noted above, it was not until the fourteenth century that the practice of the prayer of the heart became widespread within Eastern monasticism. The fourteenth century is an important era in the history of Eastern Christian spirituality and the prayer of the heart because of the emergence of the tradition of prayer known as Hesychasm.<sup>44</sup>

The term Hesychasm is derived from the Greek word *hesuchia*, connoting "quiet," or "stillness." It has a variety of meanings. More commonly, Hesychast refers to someone "who practices inner prayer and seeks silence of the heart."<sup>45</sup> In this sense, the term can be applied to writers prior to the fourteenth century. Hesychast is also used more narrowly to designate someone who practices the Jesus Prayer, especially the physical technique. More specifically, Hesychasm designates Gregory Palamas and those who supported him in the Hesychast controversy which took

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<sup>43</sup> Nicephorus taught Theoleptus of Philadelphia, who in turn was a teacher of Gregory of Palamas.

<sup>44</sup> See Ware, "The Hesychasts," 242-55.

<sup>45</sup> Ware, "The Hesychasts," 243.



place in the middle of the fourteenth century.

St. Gregory of Sinai was born a generation later than Nicephorus at the end of the thirteenth century, and was the one responsible for the increased popularity of hesychasm and its new method.<sup>46</sup> For a time, he was a monk on the island of Cyprus before he transferred to Mt. Sinai. Later, he settled on Crete where he was introduced to the practice of hesychasm. In the early part of the fourteenth century Gregory came to Mt. Athos. The monks there did not as yet know how to go beyond ascetical practices to contemplation. Gregory introduced them to the disciplines of hesychasm which gave rise to the movement which influenced Gregory Palamas.

Gregory of Sinai assigns a central place to the prayer of the heart in his spiritual teachings. He recommends the use of the physical technique as a way of keeping guard over the heart. The prayer of the heart should be continual, as far as possible. He saw the practice of the prayer as a means of attaining pure prayer. Gregory is in the affective tradition of the Macarian *Homilies*, appealing to the feeling of spiritual warmth and the conscious experience of grace.

St. Gregory Palamas (fourteenth century) is the next major figure in the evolution of the prayer of the heart.

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<sup>46</sup> Two selections from St. Gregory of Sinai are included in *Writings*. See Gregory of Sinai, "Texts on commandments and dogmas, warnings and promises; also on thoughts, passions and virtues; as well as on silence and prayer," 37-73; and "Instructions to Hesychasts," 74-94.

While his writings occupy a central place in Orthodox theology and selections from his work are included in the *Philokalia*, not much space will be given to him in this study because he is not one of the authors included in *Writings*. Palamas was one of the most influential Byzantine theologians and mystics. He was introduced to mysticism by Theoleptus of Philadelphia.<sup>47</sup> He entered the Mt. Athos monastic community and became a disciple of Gregory of Sinai. Palamas is an important figure in the development of the prayer of the heart because he successfully defended the hesychast tradition--represented by Nicephorus and Gregory of Sinai--against attack by Barlaam the Calabrian.

Towards the end of the fourteenth century St. Kallistos and St. Ignatius Xanthopoulos summarized the teaching on the prayer of the heart.<sup>48</sup> Their approach closely resembles that of Gregory of Sinai. The practice of the Jesus Prayer is given prominence in their writings. While they mention the use of the physical technique, it is to be no more than an aid. The invocation of the name of Jesus should be without thoughts or images. As far as possible, the saying

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<sup>47</sup> Two selections from Theoleptus are included in *Writings*. See Theoleptus, "A Word which expounds the secret doing in Christ and shows briefly in what the main work of monks consists," 383-94; and "Nine texts on the same subject," 395-97.

<sup>48</sup> Selections from their teachings are included in *Writings*. Please note that some scholars refer to Callistus as Kallistos, whereas in *Writings* he is referred to as Callistus. See Callistus and Ignatius of Xanthopoulos, "Directions to hesychasts, in a hundred chapters," 164-270; see also Callistus, "Texts on Prayer," 271-73.

of the prayer should be continual.

The *Philokalia* and the Spread of the  
Prayer of the Heart

The next significant stage in the evolution of the prayer of the heart was the publication of the *Philokalia* (Venice, 1742) which marks the high point of the "Hesychast renaissance."<sup>49</sup> Reacting against the ideas of the Western Enlightenment, a group of monks from Mt. Athos, known as the "Kollyvades," began a movement advocating a return to the Fathers. St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain (1749-1809) and St. Macarius of Corinth (1731-1805) were leaders of the movement. Together they edited the *Philokalia* which means, literally, "love of beauty." The *Philokalia* contains a vast collection of spiritual texts, drawn exclusively from Eastern sources, from the fourth to the fifteenth century. It has been deeply influential in the Orthodox world, and it is one of the primary sources on the prayer of the heart.

It was the publication of the *Philokalia* and its partial translation into Slavonic that enabled the spread of the prayer of the heart into Russia. While the hesychast tradition had already taken root in Russian spirituality prior to the mid-eighteenth century, the publication of the *Philokalia* made available a wide range of patristic and hesychast texts and laid the foundation for a monastic revival, including the resurgence of the role of the

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<sup>49</sup> See Kallistos Ware, "The Hesychast Renaissance," in Jones, Wainwright and Yarnold, 255-58.

*startsy*, or spiritual father, and the practice of the prayer of the heart.<sup>50</sup> Bishops Ignatii Brianchaninov (1807-67) and Theophan the Recluse (1815-94) were both (separately) Russian translators of the *Philokalia*. Another key work advocating the practice of the prayer of the heart first appeared in 1884. This was *The Way of a Pilgrim*, an anonymous piece which proved immensely popular among the laity as well as within the monastic community. In the twentieth century, through translations of the *Philokalia* and *The Way of a Pilgrim* into Western languages, the practice of the prayer of the heart has extended into the non-Orthodox world.

Writings from the "Philokalia" on

Prayer of the Heart

A number of factors have influenced the selection of a text to serve as a primary source. In the first place, the decision was made to approach the topic of this study thematically, focusing on the central elements which comprise the prayer of the heart. Because it includes selections from a variety of authors from different historical periods, a work such as the *Philokalia* contains a broader and more comprehensive perspective on the major themes of the prayer of the heart than does the writings of any single author. In the second place, there is a problem with respect to the availability of English language

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<sup>50</sup> See Sergei Hackel, "Russian [Spirituality]," in Jones, Wainwright and Yarnold, 259-76.

translations of primary texts on the prayer of the heart. Thus, the *Philokalia* has many advantages as a primary source.

However, there are also some major problems with the choice of the *Philokalia* as a primary source. To begin with, the complete work contains five volumes. A study of the kind proposed here based on all five volumes would be unmanageable. Furthermore, as of this date only the first three volumes of the *Philokalia* are available in an English language translation.<sup>51</sup> Hence, the decision was made to rely upon *Writings* as the primary source. *Writings* is a single volume containing selections of some of the most important teachings on the prayer of the heart.<sup>52</sup> It reflects the breadth and the diversity of the *Philokalia*.

The selections contained in the *Philokalia* fall into the category of spiritual teachings. The need for instruction in the life of prayer inspired their writing. This practical concern can be traced back to the early desert fathers. Athanasius' *Life of Anthony* can be considered "the first handbook of asceticism and mysticism."<sup>53</sup> The *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* is another

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<sup>51</sup> There is a forthcoming English translation from the Greek of the complete text of the *Philokalia* designed to appear in five volumes. It is translated and edited by G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware.

<sup>52</sup> The majority of the selections appearing in *Writings* are from Volume 5 of the *Philokalia* which has not yet appeared in an English language translation.

<sup>53</sup> Spidlik, 1.

primary source of instruction. The *Sayings* represent a new literary genre for which the East was to show a clear preference. In form the "sayings" resemble parables. Their power is similar to the power of the Gospels in their authenticity and their existential quality, their concreteness. They are simple and direct, and they contain practical advice. The early monks learned these sayings by heart and meditated upon them. An entire spiritual tradition arose out of the *Sayings*.

The *Sayings* and the *Philokalia* embody the living, oral tradition--later written down--of the Eastern Church. The primary means of transmitting the spiritual teaching of the desert fathers was through the relationship between the "abba," or spiritual father, and his disciples. The term "Fathers" holds a wider meaning within the Eastern Church than it does in modern patrologies. In this case the "Fathers" refer to "the monks of the desert and their heirs."<sup>54</sup> It is because of the practical concern at the heart of this oral tradition that there is such a close connection between dogma and devotion within Eastern Christian spirituality.

As noted above, the Greek *Philokalia* was compiled in the eighteenth century by Macarius of Corinth and Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain and first published in Venice in 1782. It was translated into Slavonic under the name *Dobrotolubiye*

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<sup>54</sup> Spidlik, 7.

by Paissy Velichkovsky (d. 1794). In the nineteenth century Bishop Theophan the Recluse (d. 1894) translated the *Philokalia* from Greek into Russian. It is from Theophan's Russian translation that the English translation of *Writings* was made. Because of his spiritual understanding and his importance as a modern interpreter of the prayer of the heart, the translators argue that the Russian text has a value of its own, justifying its translation into English.<sup>55</sup>

In his Russian translation Theophan amplified the original Greek edition.<sup>56</sup> It is the *Philokalia*, only augmented. When Theophan noticed that a particular author, whose writings were included in the Greek version, had written other sayings, he included them in his collection if he found them relevant. He also added sayings on the spiritual life from other fathers who were omitted in the Greek. Thus, the new *Dobrotolubiye* conforms to the old one, with additions. *Writings* is a compilation of selections made by the translators from Theophan's Russian edition of the *Philokalia*.

The *Philokalia* is a collection of writings from the hesychast fathers from the fourth to the fifteenth centuries. It describes a way of awakening attention and consciousness and how to develop them. It offers spiritual

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<sup>55</sup> See E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer, foreword to *Writings*, 6.

<sup>56</sup> See Theophan the Recluse, introduction to the *Dobrotolubiye*, in *Writings*, 16-17.

training in what the fathers termed "the art of arts and the science of sciences" leading to perfection in the life of prayer. The most effective form of training is the practice of the prayer of the heart, for the practice of the prayer of the heart fulfills the injunction to "pray always." The orthodox foundations of the *Philokalia* are grounded in scripture and tradition, both oral and written.

In the "Introduction" to the Russian translation from the Greek Theophan summarizes a description of the spiritual journey from the perspective of the *Philokalia*. It includes:

hostile attacks and temptations, struggles and victories, falls and recoveries, the birth and strengthening of various manifestations of spiritual life, degrees of general progress and the state of mind and heart corresponding to each of those degrees, the interaction in everything of grace and freedom, the sensations of God being near or far, the perception of the power of God's providence over all and one's final and irrevocable surrender into God's hand, the renunciation of all one's own methods of activity, together with a constant and intense activity.<sup>57</sup>

The readings from the *Philokalia* provide guidance for the spiritual journey. Theophan comments on the need to have the writings of the fathers on the spiritual life available. The *Philokalia* is one of the best of these collections.

Kallistos Ware outlines the main features of

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<sup>57</sup> Theophan the Recluse, introduction to the *Dobrotolubiye*, 13-14.



"Philokalic" spirituality.<sup>58</sup> In the first place, although the texts included in the *Philokalia* are written by monks for monks, the editors intended the book for all Christians, monks and laity. Second, emphasis is placed on the need for personal direction from an experienced spiritual director. This aspect goes back to the early abbas and ammas of the desert. Third, there is a close link between spirituality and dogma. Fourth, inner purpose is stressed over outward observance of ascetic rules. Key concepts in the *Philokalia* include: *nepsis*, that is, vigilance or sobriety; *prosoche*, or attention; *hesuchia*, or stillness; and the continual remembrance of God. The invocation of the name of Jesus is recommended as a means to stillness and unceasing prayer. Finally, while the *Philokalia* draws mainly upon writers in the tradition of Evagrius and Maximus the Confessor, it also includes writings by those fathers influenced by the *Homilies* of Macarius. Ware argues that "the Philokalic 'thread' represents . . . the most creative element in contemporary Orthodox spirituality."<sup>59</sup>

Thus concludes the summary sketch of the evolution of the tradition of the prayer of the heart and the rationale underlying the selection of a primary text.

The following chapter contains a discussion of the central theological elements comprising the prayer of the

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<sup>58</sup> See Ware, "The Hesychast Renaissance," 257-58.

<sup>59</sup> Ware, "The Hesychast Renaissance," 258.

heart from which a model of pastoral counseling will be constructed. Aspects of the prayer of the heart already encountered in this chapter will be presented in more depth.

### CHAPTER 3

#### The Central Theological Elements of The Prayer of the Heart

The last chapter highlighted the major stages in the development of the prayer of the heart in preparation for a discussion of the central theological elements which comprise this method of prayer. This chapter will explore these elements in more depth, relying upon *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart* as the primary source. The goal will be to convey an understanding of the major components of the prayer of the heart and their interrelationship, as well as a sense of the overall movement of the prayer. All of this lays the groundwork for a model of pastoral counseling which will follow in Chapter 4.

#### The Journey Inward

It was suggested in the previous chapter that the prayer of the heart is fundamentally a deepening movement, an inward journey. Underlying this assumption is one of the central tenets of Orthodox thought, that the spiritual life is a process of divinization. Whereas in Western theology human nature is often split into natural and supernatural categories, in the East what is meant by human nature is humanity created in the image of God. This includes the entire human being, all the faculties of the soul, as well as the body. The natural consists of the true good. Sin is understood as what goes against nature, and conversion is

viewed as a return to humanity's first nature, the image of God. Thus, the goal of human existence is divinization or deification, a restoration of humanity's true state.<sup>1</sup>

This process of the recovery of the divine image in the human person is the journey inward which constitutes the essential movement of the prayer of the heart.

#### The Heart as the Inner Treasure Chamber

Closely related to the theme of the inward journey is the notion of the heart as the inner treasure chamber. The treasure referred to here is the true self, the image of God, that lies hidden in the depths of the soul. The goal of the spiritual life is, thus, "to unearth the treasure buried in the field of [our] hearts and to gain possession of it."<sup>2</sup>

The life of prayer is seen as an entry into the heart, an inner journey, the end of which is a return to the true self.<sup>3</sup> Entering the heart is the means by which human beings enter into the commonwealth of God.

Try to enter your inner treasure-house and you will see the treasure-house of heaven. For both the one and the other are the same, and one and the same entrance reveals them both. The ladder leading to the kingdom is concealed within you, that is, in your soul. Wash yourself from sin and

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<sup>1</sup> See Spidlik, 63.

<sup>2</sup> Nicephorus of Mt. Athos, 22.

<sup>3</sup> In the West this same theme of the return to the heart, the true self, can be found in the *Confessions* of St. Augustine.

you will see the rungs of the ladder by which you can ascend thither.<sup>4</sup>

This quote points up one of the fundamental paradoxes of the Christian faith, that the commonwealth of God is within. The means of entry into the commonwealth of God is the same as the means of entry into one's deepest self. This means of entry is prayer, more specifically, the prayer of the heart.

### Compunction

As noted in the previous chapter, the doctrine of compunction occupies an important place in the teachings of the desert fathers and is one of the central elements of the prayer of the heart.

Entry into the heart--prayer--is linked to the attitude of compunction. The spiritual journey begins with sorrow for sin: "Wash yourself from sin and you will see the rungs of the ladder by which you can ascend thither [to the commonwealth of God]." This command echoes the words of Jesus: "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand."

One's heart is inaccessible to one until the shell of the inner defenses is pierced by divine grace and the innate hardness of the heart is softened by tears. The attitude of compunction is a response to the experience of being penetrated by grace. It includes a sense of relief that one is no longer isolated and alone, a feeling of gratitude for the gift of loving acceptance, and a deep sorrow for one's

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<sup>4</sup> St. Isaac of Syria, cited in Nicephorus of Mt. Athos, 30.

own wounds and the wounds one has inflicted on others. Compunction is essentially a stance or attitude of opening to grace.

The sacrament of baptism is the outward and visible sign of this inward and invisible grace, the hidden interior action of the Holy Spirit. Through the sacrament of baptism the filth of sin is washed away and the original image of God is restored. Yet, following baptism, the darkness of passionate thoughts soon obscures the mirror of the soul.

In the Divine womb, that is, in the holy font, we freely receive perfect Divine grace. If after this we cover it over with the fog of passions . . ., it is possible, even after this, to regain possession of it . . . by repentance and the fulfillment of commandments whose action is Divine.<sup>5</sup>

Weeping for one's sins is the starting point of the ascetical life, as well as a sign of progress and a mark of perfection. The monk is known as "one who mourns," a specialist in compunction. Within Eastern Christian spirituality and the prayer of the heart compunction is closely linked to "the gift of tears."<sup>6</sup> Repentance is sometimes called "a second baptism," or, "the baptism of tears." The function of tears is purification. The plate or mirror of the heart, lest it become obscured by sin,

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<sup>5</sup> Callistus and Ignatius of Xanthopoulos, 168.

<sup>6</sup> For the classic treatment of the "gift of tears" in Orthodox spirituality see John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Classics of Western Spirituality Series (New York: Paulist Press, 1982). For a contemporary treatment see Alan Jones, *Soul Making: The Desert Way of Spirituality* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), 82-106.

should be cleansed by tears, repentance and prayer. Tears soften the hardness of the heart and lead to humility.

Mourning has a twofold action: like water tears extinguish the fire of passions and wash the soul clean of their foulness; and, again, through the presence of the Holy Spirit, it is like fire bringing life, warming and inflaming the heart, and inciting it to love and desire God.<sup>7</sup>

True mourning leads to a sensation of warmth in the heart and tenderness of feeling. The heart is purified by the penetration of the fire of grace which scorches passion as in a furnace. Tender feeling in prayer comes from remembering one's sins.

Footsteps on the snow vanish, either melting in the rays of the sun or washed away by rains; and memories of deeds and objects of sensual pleasure are annihilated either by Christ, Who shines forth in the heart through prayer, or when the rain of tears (of sincere contrition) comes with deepest tenderness and feeling.<sup>8</sup>

The experience of compunction leads to an attitude of compassion. Through the gift of tears the desert fathers experienced a cosmic oneness with all of creation: "What briefly is purity? A heart filled with compassion for every creature."<sup>9</sup>

There is a crucial link between the element of

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<sup>7</sup> Symeon the New Theologian, "Practical and Theological Precepts," 114-15. For a Western treatment of compunction see "Compunctio," in Michael Casey, *Athirst for God: Spiritual Desire in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, Cistercian Studies Series, no. 77 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Pub., 1988), 120-29.

<sup>8</sup> Theoleptus, "A Word," 387.

<sup>9</sup> St. Isaac of Syria, cited in Callistus and Ignatius of Xanthopoulos, 219.

compunction and the element of asceticism. If compunction is an inner attitude, then asceticism provides the needed outer structure which supports the inner stance of openness to grace.

### The Active Life

As noted in the previous chapter, the spiritual journey is divided into two stages, the active life (*praxis*) and the contemplative life (*theoria*). John Cassian, one of the early desert fathers, teaches that while it is possible to have the ascetical life without the contemplative life, it is impossible to attain the state of contemplation without asceticism. Centuries later, Nicephorus advises that "ascent to contemplation is active life."<sup>10</sup> The underlying assumption here is that the ascent to God, contemplation, begins with the descent into self, asceticism.<sup>11</sup>

The deepening movement of prayer, begun in the experience of compunction, is continued in the active life. The essence of the active life is purification, the hidden interior action of the Holy Spirit seeking one out in the innermost parts of one's being.<sup>12</sup> One can say no to the

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<sup>10</sup> Nicephorus of Mt. Athos, 24.

<sup>11</sup> For a contemporary perspective on this theme see Maloney, 42. See also, Kenneth Leech, *Experiencing God: Theology as Spirituality* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), 342. Leech speaks of the "spiritual pilgrimage to the heart," as an inward movement, a "growing downwards." See also, Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, 34. Merton likens contemplation to "a kind of descent," a "death."

<sup>12</sup> In the West, St. John of the Cross describes this hidden interior action of the Holy Spirit in terms of "the



Holy Spirit, harden one's heart and close oneself to divine grace. Or, one can consent or surrender to the Holy Spirit, thus opening oneself to grace. However, this consent is not a one-time occurrence; it is on-going. The core of the active life is continuous surrender to the cleansing or uncovering action of grace.<sup>13</sup>

Asceticism is purely a means, an aid to opening. It is not an end in itself. The true work is the hidden interior "work" of the Holy Spirit. However, this does not mean that no human effort is involved. The fathers speak often of the labor of prayer. Human effort centers on the lengthy and

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living flame of love." He states that the same flame which is experienced as "wounding" and "grievous" in the state of purgation or purification is known as "friendly" and "sweet" in the state of union. Thus, "the same fire of love which afterwards is united with the soul and glorifies it is that which aforetime assailed it in order to purge it; even as the fire that penetrates the log of wood is the same that first of all attacked and wounded it with its flame, cleansing and stripping it of its accidents of ugliness, until, by means of its heat, it had prepared it to such a degree that it could enter it and transform it into itself." See John of the Cross, *The Living Flame of Love*, trans., ed., with an introduction by E. Allison Peers (New York: Image Books, 1962), 43-44.

<sup>13</sup> According to Alan Jones, one of the central characteristics of contemplative prayer is that it is a "school of love." The task of love is to lay us bare. This is the uncovering work of the Holy Spirit. From this perspective, prayer is exposure. See Jones, *Soul Making*, 2, 139. In a similar vein, Douglas Steere speaks of prayer as preparation to bear the "beams of love." Steere emphasizes what "a long and costly business" it is to learn this. Prayer at its deepest is "perpetual surrender to God," a "never-ending yielding." See Douglas Steere, foreword to *Contemplative Prayer* by Thomas Merton, 13.

difficult struggle which precedes and prepares for opening to grace.<sup>14</sup>

### Monasticism

At its core, monastic life embodies the life of prayer, the union of asceticism and mysticism. It forms the container for the active life. While there are other ways leading to salvation, within the prayer of the heart monasticism is considered the "royal way." Monastic life encompasses "a practical study of the art of arts and the science of sciences, to enter the mysterious path leading to God, and venture to sail the boundless mental sea."<sup>15</sup>

The admonition to "flee, be silent and pray always" summarizes the monastic way of life. Flight from the world is one of the central tenets of monasticism. Pursuit of union with God through prayer presupposes total detachment from and renunciation of the world. By "world" is meant the passions, a love for things of the senses and for the flesh.

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<sup>14</sup> Theophan the Recluse suggests that there are two stages in the life of prayer, strenuous prayer and self-impelled prayer. During the strenuous stage, prayer is still something done through conscious effort, assisted by grace. Here prayer is hard work. Self-impelled prayer, on the other hand, occurs spontaneously as a gift from God. See Theophan the Recluse, "What is Prayer?" in *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology*, trans. E. Kadloubovsky and E. M. Palmer (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), 71. This division corresponds to the distinction Peter of Celles makes between laborious (active) and devout (contemplative) prayer. Active prayer is the stage of purgation or purification, whereas contemplative prayer is experienced as a state of grace. In this stage it is no longer the person who is praying, but the Holy Spirit who prays within. See Peter of Celles, cited in Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, 60.

<sup>15</sup> Callistus and Ignatius of Xanthopoulos, 180.

Renunciation implies an absence of passionate attachments.

Let us abandon everything earthly but let us drive out of our soul even the very desire of those things. Let us hate, not only the pleasures of the body, but even its uncontrolled movements and let us strive to mortify it by labours and ascetic privations. For it is through the body that lusts are excited and brought into action.<sup>16</sup>

One of the primary means of banishing worldly thoughts and recollections is through the memory of death.

Solitude is another important aspect of monastic life. Physical withdrawal is viewed as a means of attaining inner silence. The cell is the place where the monk practices the discipline of attending to the presence of God within. Sitting in one's cell is an arduous process. Solitude cracks open the inner defenses, leading to intense spiritual struggle. However, as evinced by the life of St. Anthony, solitude is not intended as an escape from charity, nor an end in itself. The goal of solitude is to make hearts pliable. Silence completes and intensifies solitude. It is the "portable cell."

Such practices as psalmody--reciting psalms and prayers from memory--prayer and reading constitute a central focus of the monastic discipline. As mentioned in the previous chapter, monks engaged in frequent repetition of short prayers as an aid in meditation. The brevity and simplicity of these prayers made them useful in avoiding distractions.

Abstinence is another key element in the monastic way

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<sup>16</sup> Symeon the New Theologian, "Practical and Theological Precepts," 102.

of life. A moderate rule is recommended:

About the measure of abstinence in food and drink, the fathers say that one should partake of the one and the other in a measure somewhat less than one's actual need, that is, not to fill the stomach completely. Everyone should establish a measure for himself, whether in cooked food or in wine. Moreover the measure of abstinence is not limited to food and drink but embraces also conversations, sleep, garments and all the senses. Each of these should have its own measure of abstinence.<sup>17</sup>

The intent is to bring the passions under control without killing the body.

#### Positive and Negative Praxis

There are two primary aspects of the active life, positive *praxis* and negative *praxis*.<sup>18</sup> Positive *praxis* consists of keeping the commandments and cultivating the virtues. Negative *praxis* is aimed at overcoming the obstacles--sin, evil thoughts and the passions--to contemplation. A large part of the "work" of prayer is seen as a negative process, i.e. purification.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Barsanuphius and John, 352.

<sup>18</sup> See Spidlik, 179.

<sup>19</sup> In his commentary on the Canticle of Canticles, Gregory of Nyssa, one of the early desert fathers and an important figure in Eastern Christian spirituality, expresses the negative function of purification in the symbol of the succession of garments: "After removing her old tunic and divesting herself of all further clothing, [the spouse of the Canticle] became much purer than she was. And yet, in comparison with this newly acquired purity, she does not seem to have removed her headcovering. Even after that complete stripping of herself she still finds something further to remove. So it is with our ascent towards God: each state that we reach always reveals something heavy weighing on the soul. Thus, in comparison with her new found purity, that very stripping of her tunic now becomes a

The ancient ascetics are often criticized for giving more attention to negative *praxis* than to charity. However, this stress on ascetic practices is balanced by the goal of the ascetical life, love of God.<sup>20</sup> Love of God implies love for all God's creation. Loving God is linked to loving one's neighbor. This entails living in accord with Christ's commandments and striving to be filled with good works. The monk is commanded to be compassionate just as God is merciful and compassionate.

However, the outward practice of the virtues is insufficient for salvation apart from grace which transforms the inward disposition of the heart. Virtues alone cannot make the heart pure without the action of the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Holy Spirit is a token of betrothal between the soul and Christ: "As a betrothal cannot be firm until

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kind of garment which those who find her must once again remove." See *From Glory to Glory: Texts from Gregory of Nyssa's Mystical Writings*, trans. and ed. Herbert Musurillo (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979), 264. Jean Danielou comments on this passage: "It would seem then that human nature is . . . made up of a series of spheres or layers of reality, each one inside the other. The successive removal of the 'tunics' or the outer layers allows a gradual penetration into man's interior life. And all these successive deaths and resurrections bring the soul in intimate contact with God Who dwells at its center, though ever inaccessible." See Danielou, introduction to *From Glory to Glory*, 60.

<sup>20</sup> Callistus states: "If you wish to learn how to pray, keep your gaze fixed on the end of attention or of prayer. This end is adoration, contrition of the heart, love of neighbour. It is evident that lustful thoughts, whisperings of slander, hatred of one's neighbour and similar things are opposed to it. All this is incompatible with the work of prayer." See Callistus, 273.

the marriage contract is signed by trustworthy witnesses, so the light of grace is not secure before the practice of commandments and the acquisition of virtues."<sup>21</sup>

### Spiritual Warfare

The focus of spiritual warfare is the process of overcoming the obstacles to contemplation. As pointed out in the previous chapter, the theme of warfare against demons plays a prominent role in the teachings of the desert fathers.

This way of thinking may seem strange to people today. However, the notion of spiritual warfare should not be dismissed on the grounds that it is predicated on an out-dated worldview. The concept is based on important psychological realities. Entering the desert is a metaphor for the inward journey. The disciplines of solitude and silence expose one's inner conflicts. One's unknown interior abyss is opened up and the depths of one's heart are revealed.

Through the influence of Evagrius upon the development of the prayer of the heart, spiritual warfare came to center on the war against impure thoughts: "The science of sciences and the art of arts is the capacity to master harmful thoughts."<sup>22</sup> Spiritual warfare consists not only of

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<sup>21</sup> Symeon the New Theologian, "Practical and Theological Precepts," 116-17.

<sup>22</sup> Hesychius of Jerusalem, 303. See also Nicephorus of Mt. Athos, 29. He quotes St. Macarius the Great on this topic: "The most important work in spiritual struggle is to

withdrawing from all evil deeds, but also of striving to be free from all thoughts and ideas opposed to the commandments and the will of God.

The chief obstacles to inner prayer are thoughts (*logismoi*), the imagination and the passions. The term *logismos* is derived from *dialogismos*, meaning "an interior dialogue in the form of disturbing or passionate thoughts."<sup>23</sup> Not all thoughts are evil, but *logismoi* generally refers to thoughts which do not have God as their object.

There is a close relationship between demons and thoughts. The devil, being immaterial, can only lead souls astray by means of imagination and thought. Thoughts present images of passionate things. Their action is not material, but they exercise attraction towards material things--in other words, suggestions. The imagination is the fruit of passion and serves as a bridge for the demons; it represents the image of something sensory. Thoughts follow after the image or the suggestion and hold passionate conversation with it.

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enter into the heart and there to wage war against Satan; to hate Satan, and to fight him by opposing his thoughts."

<sup>23</sup> Hausherr, *Name of Jesus*, 152. See also Hausherr, *Name of Jesus*, 151-52. Here he suggests that there are two kinds of pure prayer. Pure prayer can be understood either in a theological or a psychological sense. From a moral or theological perspective, pure prayer excludes the distraction of passionate thoughts and centers exclusively upon God. From a more intellectual or psychological perspective, pure prayer in the strict Evagrian sense refers to the absence of all thoughts.

The passions are desires stirred up by the demons through the senses. It is through the passions that sin enters the heart: "The poisonous sting of sin unto death is the passionate habit of the soul."<sup>24</sup> The darkness of passionate thoughts obscures the mirror of the soul.

The waters of passions, having troubled and muddied the sea of silence, flood the soul, and can be crossed only in the light and empty boat of complete self-mastery and unpossessiveness. For intemperance and attachment to things cause torrents of passions to flood the soil of the heart and deposit there all the mud and filth of thoughts, thus confusing the mind, darkening the heart and weighing down the body.<sup>25</sup>

The goal of spiritual warfare is an attitude of passionlessness. Yet, while it is possible to conquer the passions, it is not possible to uproot them.<sup>26</sup> It is much more difficult to attain this state of passionlessness than it is to simply conform to outward forms and observances.

He who renounces worldly things such as women and wealth and so on, makes the outer man a monk, but not yet the inner man. But he who renounces the passionate thought of these things, makes a monk of the inner man, that is the mind. Such is a true monk. One can easily make the outer man a monk if one wishes, but it is no small struggle to make a monk of the inner man.<sup>27</sup>

In the warfare against thoughts, the monk has two

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<sup>24</sup> Gregory of Sinai, "Texts on commandments and dogmas," 50.

<sup>25</sup> Gregory of Sinai, "Texts on commandments and dogmas," 59-60.

<sup>26</sup> See Callistus and Ignatius of Xanthopoulos, 253. They quote St. Isaac: "Passionlessness does not mean not feeling passions, but not accepting them."

<sup>27</sup> Hesychius of Jerusalem, 293-94.



important aids to draw upon, the memory of God and the name of Jesus. Continual remembrance of God protects against harmful thoughts. Human memory, originally single and simple, has lost the memory of God through sin, becoming fragmented and divided against itself. Memory can be cured by constant remembrance of God. However, maintaining the state of "the memory of God," *mneme theou*, requires a constant effort of attention. The aim of mental warfare is to treasure the memory of God in the heart like a precious jewel.

Calling upon the name of the Lord is another powerful weapon in spiritual warfare. The name of Jesus drives away harmful thoughts. Constantly calling upon Jesus Christ purifies the heart from passionate thoughts:

He who has no prayer free from thoughts has no weapon for battle. By prayer I mean the prayer which is constantly active in the innermost secret places of the soul, so that the enemy in his secret onslaughts is invisibly flogged and scorched by calling on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>28</sup>

The outcome of spiritual warfare is *hesychia*, peace of heart. It refers to a state of inner silence or stillness which signifies "rest after warfare."<sup>29</sup> *Hesychia* represents a state of integration. The aim of spiritual warfare is the reintegration of the human psyche, which has been split apart by sin, and the health of the whole personality--body,

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<sup>28</sup> Hesychius of Jerusalem, 283.

<sup>29</sup> *Writings*, translators' note, 28.

mind, and spirit.<sup>30</sup> Here health is not limited to psychological health, but includes spiritual health, or salvation. In addition, not only does *hesychia* represent a state of integration, but it also includes the realization of a sense of oneness or connection with all other creatures.

### Guarding the Heart

As pointed out in the previous chapter, as the prayer of the heart evolved *nepsis* eventually supplanted *praxis*. The terminology of custody of the heart or guarding the heart replaced the vocabulary of asceticism. The Evagrian definition of *praxis* as the spiritual method for purifying the affective part of the soul was applied to *nepsis*. Spiritual combat became primarily interior. Rather than focusing their efforts on feats of asceticism, the hesychast monks made warfare against thoughts their primary concern.

What is *nepsis*? *Nepsis* is often translated as sobriety, sober vigilance or mental sobriety. Various terms and phrases are used to describe the inner state of attention necessary to repel thoughts and maintain an inward state of calm. Such terminology includes: guarding the heart or mind, custody of the heart or intellect, silence of the heart, and vigilance or attention. Theophan the

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<sup>30</sup> See Maloney, 15. He refers to *hesychia* as "that state of integrated ego-hood." See also Hausherr, *Name of Jesus*, 124. He remarks that the early monks had one sole concern, "that of attaining a state of total interior integration and wholeness which is literally health or salvation (*soteria*)."

Recluse, Russian translator of the *Philokalia*, sums up the concept of *nepsis*: "The essential thing is to acquire the habit of making the mind stand on guard in the heart."<sup>31</sup>

Guarding the heart is the method for turning aside the passions. Its practice leads to the state of *hesychia*. The beginning of contemplation is the taming of the passions. Guarding the heart is a means of seeking the inner treasure of the heart through cleansing it of the passions and restoring to it the image of Christ:

And so every hour and every moment let us zealously guard our heart from thoughts obscuring the mirror of the soul, which should contain, drawn and imprinted on it, only the radiant image of Jesus Christ. . . . Let us constantly seek the kingdom of heaven in the heart, and we are sure mysteriously to find within ourselves the seed, the pearl, the drink and all else, if we cleanse the eye of our mind. This is why our Lord Jesus Christ said: "The kingdom of God is within you" . . . , meaning by this the Deity dwelling in the heart.<sup>32</sup>

Sobriety, in its essence, is purity of heart. It is the spiritual art which releases the monk from passionate thoughts and evil deeds. The beginning of sobriety is abstinence, renunciation and the cutting off of all thoughts. It is also called silence of the heart, implying that the heart is kept free from all thoughts and fantasies. Mental silence demands setting aside thoughts about things as soon as one becomes aware of them. Silence is the means

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<sup>31</sup> Theophan the Recluse, footnote in *Dobrotolubiye*, in *Writings*, 158.

<sup>32</sup> Philotheus of Sinai, 333.

by which the mind is cleansed. Wakefulness is contrasted with forgetfulness. Forgetfulness extinguishes the guarding of the mind, whereas "sobriety evaporates forgetfulness from the heart."<sup>33</sup> Wakefulness, on the other hand, leads to profound silence of the soul. There are many ways of sobriety:

One way . . . is to watch closely the imagination and suggestion. . . . And another way is to keep the heart always deeply silent, all thought stilled, and to pray. Another is to call humbly and unceasingly on our Lord Jesus Christ for help. And another way is to have remembrance of death unceasingly in the soul.<sup>34</sup>

Sobriety and attention are inseparably linked.

Attention is "unceasing silence of the heart, free from all thoughts."<sup>35</sup> The heart is purified by means of attention. The life and death of the soul depend upon warfare against thoughts through attention and prayer. Without attention in oneself it is impossible to guard the mind or become pure in heart. Attention consists of "constantly standing guard in the heart."<sup>36</sup> It is the means of progress in prayer and the prerequisite for constant prayer.

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<sup>33</sup> Hesychius of Jerusalem, 299.

<sup>34</sup> Hesychius of Jerusalem, 282. Several of the authors in *Writings* mention the memory and thought of death as an aid in prayer. Philotheus of Sinai admonishes: "Many indeed are the virtues of death. It gives birth to mourning, gives guidance in all-round abstinence, it reminds a man of hell, it is the mother of prayer and tears, the guardian of the heart, the means of going deep into oneself and of good judgment." See Philotheus of Sinai, 339-40.

<sup>35</sup> Hesychius of Jerusalem, 280.

<sup>36</sup> Nicephorus of Mt. Athos, 28.

Several methods of attention are suggested.<sup>37</sup> The first method of attention involves opening the soul to longing and love of God, including shedding tears and weeping. The second method consists of leading the mind within, guarding the senses and collecting one's thoughts. What is distinctive about this method is that it takes place in the head, "thought fighting against thought."<sup>38</sup> The danger of this method is remaining in the head, for it is in the heart that evil thoughts arise. The third method is more mystical. It presupposes obedience and a clear conscience. The unique feature of the third method is that the mind should be in the heart: "It [the mind] should guard the heart while it prays, revolve, remaining within, and then, from the depths of the heart, offer up prayers to God."<sup>39</sup>

Sobriety is the path which leads to contemplation: "Sobriety is rightly called a way, for it leads to the Kingdom."<sup>40</sup> It has been compared to the ladder of Jacob. Those who undertake the ascent to contemplation do not begin at the top and then go down; rather, they start at the bottom and go upwards. The three methods of prayer and

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<sup>37</sup> See Symeon the New Theologian, "Three methods," 152-61.

<sup>38</sup> Symeon the New Theologian, "Three methods," 154.

<sup>39</sup> Symeon the New Theologian, "Three methods," 156-57.

<sup>40</sup> Philotheus of Sinai, 324.

attention are like a ladder with four rungs.<sup>41</sup> On the first rung, the monk must struggle with the mind and tame the passions. The second rung involves the practice of psalmody, or the prayer of the lips. The third rung is mental prayer. Finally, the fourth level is contemplation.

Sobriety is the inward state of interior silence, or purity of heart, that leads to true poverty of spirit. Spiritual poverty or self-emptying is a state of active receptivity, an inner silence of the heart which is a precondition for hearing the word of God within. In order to grow in perfection, the spirit needs silence on this deeper level. Thus, sobriety is not simply negative, absence. When one becomes silent at this level marvelous things begin to happen.

If the heart is completely free of fantasies, it begins to give birth to Divine and mysterious thoughts, which play within it as fishes play and dolphins leap in a calm sea. The sea is fanned by a light breeze, but the depth of the heart--by the Holy Spirit.<sup>42</sup>

### Progress in Prayer

In the prayer of the heart, the theme of progress in the spiritual life is expressed through the notion of the degrees of prayer.<sup>43</sup> Generally, descriptions of the degrees of prayer include three, or sometimes four, levels of

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<sup>41</sup> Symeon the New Theologian, "Three methods," 159.

<sup>42</sup> Hesychius of Jerusalem, 311.

<sup>43</sup> For a useful summary of the degrees of prayer, see Theophan the Recluse, "What is Prayer?" 63-74.

prayer. The first degree is bodily or oral prayer. The second degree is mental prayer, or the prayer of the mind. The third degree is the prayer of the intellect and the heart, or only of the heart. Sometimes, a fourth degree is added. This is spiritual or contemplative prayer, the prayer of ecstasy.

The notion of the degrees of prayer conveys a sense of the deepening movement which is the essence of the prayer of the heart.

You must pray not only with words but with the mind, and not only with the mind but with the heart, so that the mind understands and sees clearly what is said in words, and the heart feels what the mind is thinking. All these combined together constitute real prayer, and if any of them are absent your prayer is either not perfect, or is not prayer at all.<sup>44</sup>

The prayer of the lips. Oral or bodily prayer is preparation for the later or higher stages of prayer. It consists of reading, reciting prayers and assuming bodily postures. This is the stage of active prayer; it requires patience, labor and sweat. The attention is dispersed, the heart feels nothing, and there is little desire to pray. While the tongue repeats the words of the prayer, the mind may wander. Yet, if prayer is merely oral or bodily, it is not really prayer. In addition to words and posture, it is necessary to concentrate inwardly on the meaning of the words. Thus, this first degree of prayer naturally leads to the second degree. This is the movement from outward prayer

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<sup>44</sup> Theophan the Recluse, "What is Prayer?" 67.

to inward prayer.

The prayer of the mind. The second degree of prayer includes discursive thinking. It is termed meditation in the West. The prayer of the mind is prayer with attention. The mind is recollected rather than dispersed, and prays consciously without distraction. Prayer deepens at this stage: the words of scripture or prayers become one's own. One meditates on the words in order to take them in, to "taste" them. Saying many words in prayer disperses the mind. Hence, praying with few words is recommended. This allows the mind to be conscious of what is said in prayer.

The second degree of prayer serves as preparation for the third level, the prayer of the heart. On the second level, the one praying still relies upon his or her own intellectual resources. Knowledge remains primarily knowledge about God. The mind may understand the words of the prayer, but the heart does not experience them inwardly, as yet. The heart is unguarded, so that it may be disturbed by cares and passions. This level of prayer is, thus, imperfect and incomplete.

The prayer of the heart. It is not sufficient to reach the second degree of prayer, to remain in the head. It is necessary to descend from the head into the heart. However, this does not imply abandoning the intellect, because reason is a gift from God. The prayer of the heart is not the prayer of one faculty alone, but the prayer of the whole person. It is known as mind-in-heart prayer. The prayer of



the heart is a prayer of feeling. What was once simply thought now becomes feeling. Thought is grounded in the deeper self. This is true prayer: "Complete and real prayer comes only when the prayer of word and thought is joined by prayer of feeling."<sup>45</sup> Outward prayer is not enough; no one can dispense with inner prayer.

The prayer of ecstasy or ravishment. The fourth and final degree of prayer is contemplative prayer: "The state of contemplation is a captivity of the mind and of the entire vision by a spiritual object so overpowering that all outward things are forgotten, and wholly absent from the consciousness."<sup>46</sup> This is mystical prayer in the narrower sense. This kind of prayer goes beyond the limits of consciousness and cannot be comprehended by the mind. Ecstasy is the final degree of contemplation. In this state all of the soul's faculties are suspended, and only the activity of the Holy Spirit remains.

#### The Contemplative Life

The ideal of contemplation is central to Eastern Christian spirituality and the prayer of the heart.<sup>47</sup> Human nature is defined in terms of contemplation, full self-realization as the image of God. Contemplative union with God is the ultimate end of humanity.

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<sup>45</sup> Theophan the Recluse, "What is Prayer?" 67.

<sup>46</sup> Theophan the Recluse, "What is Prayer?" 64.

<sup>47</sup> The Orthodox Church is often characterized as "the contemplative East." See Spidlik, 328.

As the prayer of the heart evolved, the Evagrian understanding of *theologia*, intellectual contemplation in the narrow sense, broadened to include contemplation in the heart as well as contemplation in the mind. The heart became the organ of contemplation rather than the intellect. Thus, the classical definition of prayer as the ascent of the mind or *nous* to God was modified so that prayer was conceived of as the ascent of the mind and heart to God. The heart came to be seen as the center of intelligence and the seat of prayer. This joining of mind and heart represents a key development in Eastern Christian spirituality. The notion of mind-in-heart prayer constitutes one of the cardinal principles in the Orthodox doctrine of inner prayer.

The goal of mind-in-heart prayer is to enter into the place of the heart and hold the mind there, joining it to the heart. The first step is to "bring the mind down from the head to the heart."<sup>48</sup> This involves finding the place of the heart.

Keep your attention within yourself (not in your head but in your heart). Keep your mind there (in the heart), trying by every possible means to find the place where the heart is, in order that, having found it, your mind should constantly abide there.<sup>49</sup>

The physical method, referred to in the previous

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<sup>48</sup> Theophan the Recluse, footnote in *Dobrotolubiye*, in *Writings*, 158.

<sup>49</sup> Symeon the New Theologian, "Three methods," 158-59.

chapter, is recommended as a method for bringing the mind down from the head into the heart.

Thus breathing is a natural way to the heart. And so, having collected your mind within you, lead it into the channel of breathing through which air reaches the heart and, together with this inhaled air, force your mind to descend into the heart and to remain there.<sup>50</sup>

The Jesus Prayer serves as an aid in concentrating the thoughts and holding the mind in the heart. The mind, once it has been led into the heart, is not to be left silent and idle. Rather, the invocation of the Jesus Prayer should be its constant occupation.

Remembrance of God and calling on the name of Jesus Christ root the attention in the heart. The mind learns to suppress its wanderings: "When by remembrance of God we close all the exits of our mind it has need of some obligatory work to satisfy its restlessness. The only thing it should be given is the sacred name of our Lord Jesus."<sup>51</sup> When the name of Jesus becomes established in the warmth of the heart through the practice of continual remembrance, it gives birth to the habit of unhampered love of God.

For as the more the rain pours down upon the earth, the more it softens the earth; so too the holy Name of Christ when it is invoked by us without thoughts, the more constantly we call upon it, the more it softens the earth of our heart, and fills it with joy and delight.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Nicephorus of Mt. Athos, 33.

<sup>51</sup> St. Diadochus, cited in Callistus and Ignatius of Xanthopoulos, 24.

<sup>52</sup> Hesychius of Jerusalem, 288.

How does one keep the mind in the heart? This is impossible apart from the grace of the Holy Spirit. Because the mind has acquired the habit of dispersion, it cannot be held simply by human effort. The mind is held by the Spirit: "Ours is only the labour, while the object itself, that is the joining of mind and heart, is a gift of grace."<sup>53</sup>

Mind-in-heart prayer is a type of centering prayer. The purpose is to pray purely and without distraction, listening to the words of the prayer and going deeply into them until the mind becomes illumined by grace. The goal is to become one with the words of the prayer. The name of the Lord penetrates the heart, descending into its depths where it becomes the center of the one praying, uniting the one praying with the Lord. Prayer deepens as the mind returns attention to itself. Through such attention the mind reunites with itself, becoming one with the prayer and, together with the prayer, descends into the heart, remaining there forever.<sup>54</sup>

The goal of mind-in-heart prayer is pure prayer, "a state in which the mind is always in the heart."<sup>55</sup> Prayer is grounded in the heart, with the mind kept nearby. The challenge of this type of prayer is not to come out of the

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<sup>53</sup> Theophan the Recluse, "The Fruits of Prayer," *Art of Prayer*, 158-59.

<sup>54</sup> Callistus and Ignatius of Xanthopoulos, 193.

<sup>55</sup> Callistus and Ignatius of Xanthopoulos, 228.

heart too quickly because of the emotions encountered in the depths. However, when the mind becomes accustomed to remaining within, it begins to dislike being distracted by external things. Once having discovered the commonwealth of God within, external things lose their attraction and remaining within is no longer wearisome. It no longer requires such an effort to bring the mind down into the heart against its will, so that it immediately jumps out again. The mind loves to remain in the heart where it prays without ceasing.

This understanding of pure prayer, where prayer is centered in the heart and all action flows from prayer, is also termed "mental prayer."<sup>56</sup> In mental prayer the mind withdraws from external things and is collected within. Consciousness is returned to God. Through constant remembrance of God, the one praying is led within and shown the bridal chamber of the heart, gaining access to the hidden treasure of the mind. Mental prayer is the union of mind and heart with the Divine.

The union of the heart and mind with the Divine is like a betrothal. The heart, having been purified, becomes the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, revealing the image of God as in a mirror. This betrothal results in the advent of Christ within.

Mind-in-heart prayer, prayer that is pure and

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<sup>56</sup> Theoleptus, "A Word," 390.

undistracted, gives birth to a sensation of warmth in the heart and causes tears to flow. The source of this warmth is grace. The experience of grace kindles a pure and single-hearted desire for the source of grace in the one praying, thus driving away all distractions in prayer. One is advised to keep this warmth unextinguished, never ceasing "to add fire to fire, warmth to warmth, desire to desire, zeal to zeal."<sup>57</sup> In order to refine one's inner gold, one must not leave the furnace of prayer without fire for even a short time, lest the ore harden again.

Remaining in the heart is the work of a lifetime. Mind-in-heart prayer is not something achieved with ease. Rather, inner prayer requires a lengthy process, much effort, and intense concentration.

Mind-in-heart prayer is prayer without ceasing. As pointed out in the previous chapter, the prayer of the heart originated in the desert father's quest for constant prayer. The ultimate goal of the prayer of the heart is union with God through continuous prayer. At this stage, all of life becomes prayer. It is important to remember that the state of constant prayer is not limited to an elite few. Rather, continual prayer has to be something that is possible for everyone. Paul's injunction to "pray always" comes to mind.

Pure or continual prayer is greater than all human effort, because it only comes as a gift of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>57</sup> St. John of the Ladder, cited in Callistus and Ignatius of Xanthopoulos, 229.

When one is granted constant prayer she or he becomes the abode of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore it is said that when the Holy Spirit comes to live in a man, he never ceases to pray, for then the Holy Spirit Himself constantly prays in him (Rom. viii.26). Then prayer never stops in a man's soul, whether he is asleep or awake. In eating or drinking, sleeping or doing something, even in deep sleep his heart sends forth without the effort the incense and sighs of prayer.<sup>58</sup>

Contemplation, pure prayer, prayer where the mind is always in the heart cannot be understood as an act of the will, or a series of acts. Rather, continual prayer is a state of being, a state of the heart. Here, state refers to a quality or habit. What matters is the disposition of the heart. The state of unceasing prayer is only reached through acquiring a habitual disposition of the heart: "Prayer of the heart becomes the unremitting consciousness of God's abiding presence deep within us."<sup>59</sup> This is the state of implicit prayer.<sup>60</sup>

This understanding of continual prayer as a state of being is summarized in Theophan's classic definition of prayer: "The principal thing is to stand with the mind in the heart before God, and to go on standing before Him unceasingly day and night, until the end of life."<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> St. Isaac, cited in Callistus and Ignatius of Xanthopoulos, 213.

<sup>59</sup> Maloney, 57.

<sup>60</sup> For more on the contrast between explicit prayer and implicit prayer see Hausherr, *Name of Jesus*, 130-31.

<sup>61</sup> Theophan the Recluse, "What is Prayer," 63.

Summary: The Movement of the Prayer of the Heart

The prayer of the heart exists on two levels.

Outwardly, it is a form of contemplative prayer which originated in the fourth century and developed into one of the central theological traditions in the Eastern Christian Church. Inwardly, it is a deepening movement of grace, a process of divinization. The particular method of the prayer of the heart evolved as one way of containing this movement of grace.

One of the central elements of the prayer is the notion of the heart as the inner treasure-chamber. The core of the person, the essence of the human being, is humanity created in the image of God. Through sin the original divine image gets covered over. One's inner treasure becomes inaccessible. The goal of the life of prayer is to unearth the treasure and gain possession of it. Paradoxically, entry into the heart, the depths of the human being, is at the same time the means of entry into the commonwealth of heaven.

The second major element of the prayer of the heart is the element of compunction. Entry into the heart is linked to the experience of compunction. Prayer begins with sorrow for sin. Compunction is the sensation of being pierced or pricked. Grace penetrates through the layers of inner defense to the place of concealment. This is the secret, uncovering action of the Holy Spirit seeking human beings out in their contrived hiding places.



Tears symbolize the cleansing function of compunction. The gift of tears is an outward response to the inward softening action of the Holy Spirit. Hardness of heart gradually gives way to an opening to grace. Compunction is the foundation of purification in prayer. It is an attitude of openness to grace, a removal of internal barriers, a letting down of inner defenses. The experience of compunction is both painful and joyful. It is painful in that one's innermost wounds are exposed. It is also joyful. The treasure that has been inaccessible, the image of God within, is now available.

A third element of the prayer of the heart is the element of asceticism, the active life. The active life is a continuation of the cleansing process begun in the experience of compunction. One of the central paradoxes in the life of prayer is that ascent to God begins with descent into self. Prayer is not an escape from life, a cutting-off or a rising above; rather, it is an entry into life. Ascent is really descent, the deepening or uncovering movement of grace within.

The emphasis in the active life is on human effort, the hard work and lengthy struggle involved in consenting to the uncovering action of the Holy Spirit. Monasticism is the institution which developed as a container for the life of prayer. It represents the union of human effort and divine grace. Monastic discipline and ascetic practices provide the outer structure and support for the inner cleansing work

of grace.

The fourth element of the prayer of the heart is the element of spiritual warfare. It is an aspect of the active life. The concept of spiritual warfare refers to the internal conflict which arises as a consequence of the uncovering action of the Holy Spirit. There is a part of the human being that opposes God and the movement of grace. Entering the desert of contemplation signifies confronting the empty, barren, hostile places inside oneself. This is the abode of one's inner demons. What was hidden in one becomes exposed. As a consequence, one ends up having to encounter aspects of oneself and one's experience that have been cut-off because they were too painful or too difficult to face. The goal of spiritual warfare is peace of heart. It is not the absence of conflict that is the result of suppression or denial. Rather, it is a state of integration and reconnection, or health and wholeness.

The fifth element of the prayer of the heart is the element of guarding the heart. As the tradition evolved, the concept of spiritual warfare came to center on the warfare against thoughts. Guarding the heart is the chief method for shutting out internal noise and other distractions in prayer. Sobriety is the deep inner silence which is a prerequisite for hearing the word of God within. Attention is focused on the interior movement of grace.

The notion of progress in the life of prayer is the sixth element of the prayer of the heart. The metaphors of

the degrees of prayer and the rungs of a ladder are used to describe the interior movement of grace penetrating ever more deeply to the heart. In the early stages of prayer, one is more aware of the effort of prayer, the energy it takes to stay present and focus attention. One's affect tends to remain fairly shallow at this level. With practice prayer gradually deepens. Concentration comes more easily, and one begins to take in the words of the prayer. However, one still experiences distractions and conflict in prayer, and the words have not yet reached one's heart. Finally, as prayer deepens even more, feeling joins thought as prayer becomes centered in the heart.

The last element is the concept of mind-in-heart prayer, or contemplation. Mind-in-heart prayer is the stage of prayer where the mind is always in the heart. It represents the joining or integration of mind and heart. Here one has learned to be present in the heart, at one's center. Remaining in the heart is the work of a lifetime. One still experiences, in varying degrees, the on-going tension between effort and grace. The furnace of prayer is a metaphor for the uncovering action of the Holy Spirit which is never-ending. Mind-in-heart prayer is prayer without ceasing. One's prayer becomes big enough to include all of life. Mind-in-heart prayer is a state of being. It is a disposition of the heart wherein one continually consents to grace. This is the state of implicit prayer where all of one's actions proceed from prayer. At its

deepest, mind-in-heart prayer is the Holy Spirit praying in one at all times and in all places.

This concludes the summary of the central theological elements of the prayer of the heart. The next chapter will build on selected aspects of these elements in the presentation of a model of pastoral counseling.

## CHAPTER 4

### The Prayer of the Heart:

#### A Way in to Human Interiority

The thesis of this study is that the prayer of the heart is a metaphor for the deepening movement of grace within the person and that this dynamic forms the spiritual core of the pastoral counseling process. It is the contention here that this deepening movement of grace provides a path or a way in to human interiority.

This chapter explores the metaphor of the prayer of the heart in more depth, suggesting ways in which it might serve as a model for understanding the pastoral counseling process as spiritual formation. The first section, "The Heart: The Dimension of Depth in Human Experience," examines the notion of the heart as the depth dimension, the point of contact between God and human beings. The second section, "The Inward Journey to the Heart: The Descent into the Self," deals with the pastoral counseling process as consenting to the deepening movement of grace. The third section, "Contemplation: Self-in-God," explores the notion of mind-in-heart prayer as a method for the integration of the personality, but more than that, an experience of union with the divine. The last section, "Conclusion: A Theological Container for the Pastoral Counseling Process," suggests some implications for seeing the prayer of the heart as a theological container for the pastoral counseling process.

The Heart: The Dimension of Depth  
in Human Experience

In the prayer of the heart, the heart is seen as the dimension of depth in human experience. It is the deepest level of awareness. The heart is the deep center of the person, the center of consciousness and the unconscious. The dark heart is the inner abyss, the hidden dimension of experience as opposed to what is visible, what appears on the surface. The heart is what is meant by human interiority.

However, the prayer of the heart also teaches that the deepest part of the person is spiritual, not psychological. Thus, the model of the prayer of the heart addresses one of the central concerns raised in Chapter 1, the need for an understanding of the human that includes the spiritual dimension, as well as the psychological dimension, of human experience. It will be argued here that the notion of the heart as the depth dimension encompasses both.

The heart, one's innermost core, is the point of contact between the human and the divine. It is in the depths of the heart that one encounters God.

There are unfathomable depths within the heart. God is there with the angels, light and life are there, the kingdom and the apostles, the heavenly cities, and the treasures of grace, all things are there.<sup>1</sup>

God is the ultimate dimension of depth in human experience,

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<sup>1</sup> Macarius, cited in Leech, *Soul Friend*, 136.

the ground of the soul. The heart is the seat or dwelling place of God.

The prayer of the heart is an attempt to express the profound relationship between the depths of God and the depths of the human person. According to Thomas Merton, the purpose of the prayer of the heart is to seek the deepest ground of one's identity in God. The discovery of one's own inner depths coincides with the discovery of God as the ground of the self.<sup>2</sup>

How is the divine transcendence understood in this context? If God is seen as the dimension of depth in human experience, then the divine transcendence is understood as depth or mystery. God is intimate otherness, the divine lover calling human beings ever more deeply into relationship. The stress is on intimacy rather than hierarchy. Viewing transcendence as depth rather than as absolute distance allows for the otherness of the divine while, at the same time, recognizing the relational nature and the availability of the divine.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, 67.

<sup>3</sup> For a feminist perspective on the theme of the divine immanence see Sallie McFague, "God the Father: Model or Idol?" in *Metaphorical Theology*. She presents a brief summary of the feminist critique of the paradigm of God as transcendent father in patriarchal religion. As an alternative, McFague suggests the metaphor of God as friend. The friendship model moves away from a hierarchical view of the relationship between God and human beings toward a more egalitarian view with strong immanent tendencies. She argues that in the friendship model intimacy is balanced with mystery: "The mystics witness to this paradox of intimacy and distance." See Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical*

This understanding of the relationship between human interiority and the divine speaks to one of the issues raised by Thayer in Chapter 1. He emphasized the importance of recovering the realm of transcendence along with the realm of interiority. It will be argued here that the model of the prayer of the heart is particularly well-suited to this task.

The Human Condition: The True Self  
as Buried Treasure

The goal of the prayer of the heart is "to unearth the treasure buried in the field of [one's] heart and to gain possession of it."<sup>4</sup> The treasure is the true self, the divine image. This is one's Yes!, one's wholehearted response to the Divine Yes! to creation. However, the divine image has become obscured or covered over by sin. One's inner treasure is buried and, thus, inaccessible to one. The work of prayer is to cleanse the mirror of the heart so that it once again reflects the divine image, the image of the indwelling Christ.

This view of the human condition has been significantly influenced by the dualistic anthropology of the desert fathers. It presents a major obstacle for a contemporary model of pastoral counseling. Following a brief critique, some modifications to the model will be suggested.

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*Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 189.

<sup>4</sup> Nicephorus of Mt. Athos, 22.



The dualistic anthropology of ascetic spirituality, which includes the tradition of the prayer of the heart, contains an inherent tension between the biblical doctrine of the goodness of creation and an "alienated world-fleeing view of redemption."<sup>5</sup> Even though the early church condemned the notion of two creations, one spiritual and one material, as first proposed by Origen and later by Evagrius, orthodox theologians in the fourth century adopted a modified Origenism. According to this perspective, creation and humanity were originally spiritual and unitary in contrast to a secondary form which was bodily and sexual. The goal of the spiritual life was understood as a return to the original spiritual creation.

Thus, the prayer of the heart came to incorporate a dualistic spirituality and eschatology that identified redemption with the rejection of the body and the domination of the intellect over material, sensual nature. Sin was defined as the disordering of the flesh or the body to the spirit. As a consequence of the fall, the mind became subject to the passions, and it was through the passions that sin entered the heart.

Contemporary theologians have condemned matter-spirit dualism as Hellenistic and unbiblical. Taking the critique

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<sup>5</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church," in *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 151.

one step further, feminist theologians have pointed out that in the writings of the church fathers women were identified with matter and men with spirit. Thus, female-male dualism was combined with matter-spirit dualism. As a consequence, the subjugation of women under patriarchy was justified on theological grounds.<sup>6</sup>

One of the criteria for the understanding of the pastoral counseling process being presented here is that it should be nondualistic. In contrast to the view of the human condition reflected in the prayer of the heart which identifies redemption with flight from the world and the renunciation of the flesh and its accompanying passions, the position represented in this study holds that salvation is through the totality of human experience, through the affirmation of the wholeness of one's being, and not through the denial of various aspects of one's humanity.

According to this understanding, the goal of the pastoral counseling process is for the pastoral counselor to aid the client in unearthing the treasure of his or her true self and in gaining possession of her or his inner treasure. The client's inner treasure is buried under the layers of the false self and is, thus, inaccessible to the client. The work of pastoral counseling parallels the work of

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<sup>6</sup> James B. Nelson speaks of these two dualisms as spiritualistic or Hellenistic dualism and sexist or patriarchal dualism. He argues that sexist dualism is "at least as important as spiritualistic dualism." See James B. Nelson, *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1978), 46.

prayer. The process is one of cleansing the mirror of the heart so that it once again reflects the true self, the divine image.

The understanding of the true self assumed here is taken from psychoanalytic object relations theory, one of the leading schools of modern depth psychology.<sup>7</sup> According to this perspective, the self is formed by the internalization of its relationships. It is an inherently a relational view of the self. Experience is the basis of the self. It will be seen that both of these characteristics, the relational nature of human existence and an emphasis on experience, are important in an understanding of the pastoral counseling process based on the prayer of the heart.

The dualistic anthropology of the prayer of the heart is not the only obstacle for a contemporary model of pastoral counseling. The interpretation of sin found in the prayer of the heart is also problematic. It has been influenced by the dualistic anthropology underlying the prayer of the heart.<sup>8</sup> According to this perspective, it is

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<sup>7</sup> Sources on object relations theory are plentiful. The primary source relied upon in this study is by Alice Miller, *The Drama of the Gifted Child*, trans. Ruth Ward (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

For an excellent summary of objects relations theory by a pastoral counselor, see Gerkin, 77-96.

<sup>8</sup> Louis Bouyer makes the following observation on the relation between Platonic dualism and Christian dualism in the writings of the desert fathers: "Platonic dualism lends its formulations to a Christian dualism, completely existential, in which it is not primarily matter that is

through the passions that sin enters the heart.

However, in the understanding of the pastoral counseling process presented here, this interpretation of sin has been modified by insights from depth psychology. Here, sin is seen as an expression of human woundedness rather than the outcome of a fallen nature.<sup>9</sup> This interpretation of sin is based on the understanding of the development of the self found in object relations theory. According to this view, the source of human woundedness can be traced back to the denial of the feeling self by the outer world. The self's earliest experience is one in which the self is not received and mirrored back. The experience of having one's self received and mirrored back to one validates and confirms one's ultimate value. When this does not happen, it is as if that in one which is not received and mirrored back does not exist.

A false self comes into being in response to the denial of the true self by the outer world. The child adapts to the world in which she or he finds him or herself. When there is no adult present with a big enough sense of self to help the child process and integrate her or his experience, these aspects of the child's being are split off and

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metaphysically opposed to spirit, but sin that is opposed to the will of God." See Bouyer, *The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers*, 353.

<sup>9</sup> For more on an interpretation of sin as damage, see Rita N. Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1988), 1-24.

repressed. As a consequence, they become unavailable. Thus, the true self is buried. The false self protects and hides the vulnerable true self.<sup>10</sup>

### Clinical Illustration<sup>11</sup>

The client is a woman in her early fifties. She is divorced and has two grown children. She is highly-regarded in her profession as a nurse and well-liked by her friends. She is a talented musician and an active member of her church. Her issues include: chronic depression, overweight, physical symptoms, loneliness, and lack of self esteem.<sup>12</sup>

She comes from a family system where she experienced difficulties in bonding with her caregivers in her early life. She experienced emotional deprivation as well as sexual abuse. The client's needs and feelings were not recognized and responded to by her caregivers. She felt unvalued and abandoned.

She lives with the effects of her childhood to this day. Even though she has a number of close friends and colleagues who value her, she is unable to take this in and know it experientially. Likewise, she is unable to receive praise or compliments on her work or her musical

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<sup>10</sup> For more on the development of the false self, see Miller, 12-13.

<sup>11</sup> Please note that in each of the clinical illustrations included in this study identifying data has been disguised and the client has given written permission for the material to be used.

<sup>12</sup> For more on the relation between depression and the loss of the self, see Miller, 45.

performance. She is unable to experience at her core the gift she is.

The counseling process has focused on helping her to reconnect with the rejected parts of herself. Her depression is a symptom of her inability to access her inner experience. Over the years she has built up formidable barriers to prevent herself from being overwhelmed by the depths of rage and pain she carries around inside. She images herself as a dragon with thickened skin which hides and protects her tender inner core. She is covered with scales representing all the things she hates about herself. In order to recover the jewel of her feeling self, these protective layers have to be stripped away in a safe and nurturing environment.

#### The Theological Aspect of the Depth Dimension:

##### The Commonwealth of Heaven

Prayer is entry into the heart, the depth dimension in human experience, and the process of entering the heart is the way in to the commonwealth of heaven.

Try to enter your inner treasure-house and you will see the treasure-house of heaven. For both the one and the other are the same, and one and the same entrance reveals them both.<sup>13</sup>

One of the fundamental paradoxes of the Christian faith is the teaching that the commonwealth of God lies within one. This belief is related to the idea of God as the

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<sup>13</sup> St. Isaac of Syria, cited in Nicephorus of Mt. Athos, 30.

dimension of depth in human experience and the concomitant notion of the heart as the seat of God. It forms the theological foundation for understanding prayer as a descent into the depths, a journey into the divine.

If the prayer of the heart is a model for the pastoral counseling process, then the ultimate goal of the process is spiritual or theological, entry into the commonwealth of heaven. The means of entrance is through the process of entering the heart, the depth dimension in human experience.

This premise has important implications for pastoral counseling. It implies that the longing for one's true self and the longing for the divine are not ultimately separate and antagonistic. One does not have to choose between the two. The promise is that somehow the search for one's true self and the search for God lie along the same path.

#### Clinical Illustration

This illustration concerns a student in a pastoral counseling training program. During the semester when the focus was on the integration of psychotherapy with spirituality, this student underwent a "dark night" with respect to her relationship with the Roman Catholic Church, God, and the theological tradition she had studied so passionately as an undergraduate. She felt that she had been deeply wounded by male theology, male spiritual directors, and the male institutional church. She articulated this wounding in terms of the rape of her inner child. The message she had received from her religious

tradition was that the way to God was through the denial of her self. At this time in her life, her primary experience of God was a sense of absence, darkness, and pain.

The course emphasized a yearning for God as one of the central elements in the spiritual journey. This student recalled that in the past when she had shared her yearning with spiritual directors, they had informed her that it was a precious gift to be treasured and urged her not to let go of it. Looking back on this time in her life, she now questioned whether the yearning she experienced then was truly a longing for God. From her present perspective, after undergoing personal therapy, she believes that, instead of a yearning for God, what she felt was a longing for the wounded and abandoned parts of herself, a self lost to her long ago.

The question arising out of this illustration is, Does the quest for one's lost self have to be a different quest than one's quest for God, or are the two somehow related and intertwined?

#### The Psychological Aspect of the Depth Dimension:

##### Primordial Experience

One of the most significant contributions of modern depth psychology to the field of pastoral counseling is its understanding of the depth dimension in human experience. From a psychological perspective, what does it mean to talk about the process of entering the depths?

Ann and Barry Ulanov use the term "primordial



experience" to refer to the depth dimension in human experience. Primordial experience is

the original strata of human life; we meet all that has gone before us that remains instinct in the human psyche. We call it primordial because it is the most basic and important level of human experience, though much of our conscious life is devoted to eluding and repressing it. Its contents are, to begin with chiefly made up of unconscious materials, but they move so boldly and so often into consciousness that we cannot equate primordial experience with the unconscious.<sup>14</sup>

Primordial experience, also referred to as primary process or nondirected thinking, is the source of meaning and value in one's life. The Ulanovs liken it to "a rushing river of being."<sup>15</sup> The goal of analysis and the spiritual life is to live closer to this subterranean level of being, the wellspring of life.

Primordial experience is mediated to consciousness through the special language of the unconscious. Primary process or nondirected thinking is a language of instinct, affect and images. It underlies the secondary or directed thinking of consciousness. It expresses one's deepest experience. Primary process thinking is "that level of our psyche's functioning that leads straight to the workings of our soul."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ulanov and Ulanov, *Religion and the Unconscious*, 13.

<sup>15</sup> Ulanov and Ulanov, *Religion and the Unconscious*, 26.

<sup>16</sup> Ann Ulanov and Barry Ulanov, *Primary Speech: A Psychology of Prayer* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 2.

The Ulanovs refer to prayer as "primary speech."<sup>17</sup> Prayer is one's "primordial discourse,"<sup>18</sup> the place where one asserts one's being. It is an expression of the true self, one's Yes!

Primary speech is prayer because it is a response to the divine, although one may have no awareness of this at first. There is a directionality to prayer, a seeking out of the other in response to God's initiative. Prayer is an expression of human spiritual longing for connection at the core of one's being.

The intentional act of praying begins with listening: "To pray is to listen and to hear this self who is speaking."<sup>19</sup> It is an attitude of receptivity to one's primordial experience. To pray is to listen to the deepest thing in one.

The more one listens to the deepest thing in one, one's primordial experience, the more one becomes aware of the grace hidden in the depths. One begins to discern a directionality to one's prayer. This directionality is the deepening movement of grace drawing one deeper into one's self, yet, paradoxically, deeper into the divine, one's self-in-God.

What are the implications of this perspective for the

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<sup>17</sup> Ulanov and Ulanov, *Primary Speech*, vii.

<sup>18</sup> Ulanov and Ulanov, *Primary Speech*, vii.

<sup>19</sup> Ulanov and Ulanov, *Primary Speech*, 1.

pastoral counseling process?

One of the assumptions in this study is that grace is present in the depths of the client whether or not she or he is aware of it.<sup>20</sup> This is the hidden, uncovering action of the Holy Spirit seeking one out in the depths of one's being. God is present and active in all aspects of the client's life. God is encountered in the midst of life, wherever this deepening process is occurring.

The pastoral counseling process is similar to prayer in that it is a process of becoming aware of one's passion. Something happens when one begins to pay attention to the deepest thing in one. Things start to shake loose inside. God's call or invitation originates in the depths. As one follows the lure of one's primordial experience into one's depths, one begins to discern direction in one's life. The source of direction is the deepening movement of grace within one. Paying attention to the deepest thing in one, one's primary speech, takes one into the heart, the place of encounter with God.

An example of this will be found in the clinical illustration on pages 204-07. In this example the client is frustrated with her relationship with God. When she prays, God seems far away. At the same time, the client often

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<sup>20</sup> For a similar perspective on the notion of God as the dimension of depth in human experience and the implications of this for the practice of pastoral counseling, see Thomas Hart, "Counseling's Spiritual Dimension: Nine Guiding Principles," *Journal of Pastoral Care*, 43, no. 2 (Summer 1989): 111-18.

shuts down emotionally when she gets too close to painful material. She tends to think of God as being "out there," not "in here." God is someone she prays to for answers or direction while she ignores her own deepest experience as a source value and direction. The view of pastoral counseling represented here assumes that the divine is present in human experience, that one does not have to turn away from one's humanity in order to encounter the divine. God is found in the most unlikely places.

Another assumption of this study is that everybody prays whether or not they recognize it as such. This statement has important implications as far as the pluralistic context of most pastoral counseling. It is consistent with the notion that the spiritual dimension is a fundamental category of human existence.

At the beginning of the pastoral counseling process the client is generally unable to receive much of his or her primordial experience. The role of the pastoral counselor is to hear the client's prayer, "to listen with the heart, to hear the language that lives in the Silence as it lives in the Word."<sup>21</sup> It is to hear the client's primary speech, her or his "unconscious voice," his or her Yes!<sup>22</sup> One's

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<sup>21</sup> Marion Woodman, *The Pregnant Virgin: A Process of Psychological Transformation* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1985), 11.

<sup>22</sup> In a similar vein, Thomas Merton writes about the role of the monk: "For the monk searches not only his own heart: he plunges deep into the heart of that world of which he remains a part although he seems to have 'left' it. In

prayer is one's Yes!, one's response to the deepening movement of grace within one. The pastoral counselor functions as midwife, receiving the client's Yes!, assisting in the birth of the true self.

The recovery and healing of memories of childhood sexual abuse are a good example of how this works in the actual pastoral counseling process. In several of the clinical illustrations that are included here the process is similar. The focus moves back and forth between situations in the client's daily life and working with depth material. This may include instructing the client to keep a journal, record his or her dreams, and make drawings of dream images or other significant images.

Often at the beginning of the pastoral counseling process the client has no conscious memories of abuse. Paying attention to depth material is a means of accessing the client's inner world. Working with this depth material in the safety of the pastoral counseling setting often permits repressed experiences to surface where they can be integrated into the client's conscious sense of self. The assumption is that the divine grace is at the core of this healing process. It is the hidden, uncovering action of the Holy Spirit seeking one out in the depths of one's being that lies underneath the surfacing of these memories.

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reality the monk abandons the world only in order to listen more intently to the deepest and most neglected voices that proceed from its inner depths." See Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, 23.

### The Inward Journey to the Heart: The Descent into the Self

The previous section focused on the notion of the heart as the dimension of depth in human experience. It was argued that the prayer of the heart is a metaphor for the deepening movement of grace within the person and that this dynamic provides a way in to human interiority. This section will focus on the deepening process, the descent into the self, that forms the spiritual core of the pastoral counseling process.

#### The Ladder: A Metaphor for Grace

The ladder leading to the kingdom is concealed within you, that is, in your soul (or heart).<sup>23</sup>

The metaphor of the ladder conveys two key truths. In the first place, it suggests that there is a way out of the human dilemma. Several of the theologians referred to in Chapter 1 commented that, as a consequence of modernity and the secularizing trend in the culture, many people today experience a profound sense of alienation. They described this alienation in terms of a gap between the depth or religious dimension of human experience and daily life.

The paradox presented by the prayer of the heart is that the way out is actually a way in, a way in to human interiority. This understanding of prayer as a way in to the depths of human experience is problematic for some

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<sup>23</sup> St. Isaac of Syria, cited in Nicephorus of Mt. Athos, 30.

people. They have come to view prayer and spirituality as a means of escaping their own suffering and the suffering in the world rather than a means of entering into it more fully.

The second quality that stands out in this quote is that the ladder is concealed. The ladder is concealed within one. It is hidden in the depths of one's experience. The client mentioned in one of the clinical illustrations, see pages 188-91, shared a dream early in the pastoral counseling process. In the dream she saw a park where she wanted to go. Only the entrance to the park led through a garbage dump. She was angry about having to go through the garbage dump in order to get to the park.

#### Compunction: A Work of Love

Wash yourself from sin and you will see the rungs of the ladder by which you can ascend thither [to the commonwealth of God].<sup>24</sup>

To summarize from Chapter 3, the notion of compunction, sorrow for sin, is another one of the central theological elements in the prayer of the heart. Entry into the heart, the inner treasure-chamber, is linked to the attitude of compunction. The prayer of the heart teaches that spiritual journey begins with sorrow for sin.

The human dilemma is that one's inner treasure, one's true self, is inaccessible to one.<sup>25</sup> The plate or mirror of

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<sup>24</sup> St. Isaac of Syria, cited in Nicephorus of Mt. Athos, 30.

<sup>25</sup> One of the central paradoxes of the spiritual life

the heart, rather than reflecting the jewel inside, becomes covered over by the layers of the false self, thus obscuring the divine image, one's true self. It is the tears of compunction which cleanse the mirror of one's heart.

God is the one who effects compunction. Only grace can penetrate the depths of human interiority.

The "sea" is the mind of man and God enters its depths. . . . God penetrates the depths of the sea, when he changes desperate hearts . . . for what abyss is there except the human mind which, while unable to comprehend itself, is like an obscure abyss, hidden from itself in everything that is. . . . God walks, as it were, in the abyss, when he penetrates the dark heart and tramples the invisible waves of sin.<sup>26</sup>

There is a positive side to the experience of compunction. Compunction is a work of love. It is an energizing force. One is pierced or penetrated by grace.<sup>27</sup>

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is that the quest for God begins with a return to one's heart. Augustine writes how, after searching for God outside of himself, he came to discover God in the depths of his soul: "I was outside. You were within." See Leech, *Experiencing God*, 324.

Douglas Steere also emphasizes this belief that God is the one who remains present in steadfast love, while it is human beings who are absent: "We are too elsewhere. We are not at home in ourselves. We are 'cut off outside ourselves.'" See Douglas V. Steere, *Together in Solitude* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1982), 137.

<sup>26</sup> St. Gregory the Great, cited in Leech, *Soul Friend*, 136.

<sup>27</sup> Gregory of Nyssa writes with great passion about the deepening movement of grace seeking one out in the depths of one's being. In his *Fourth Homily on the Canticle* he observes: "The Bride praises the skillful archer who has so well directed his arrow towards her. For she says: 'I am wounded with love.' She shows thereby the nature of that arrow which is planted in the innermost depth of her heart. The archer is agape." He continues: "O beautiful wound and happy blow by which Life penetrates within, by the cleaving



Grace is stronger than one's defenses. God refuses to allow one's true self to remain buried. The experience of compunction is the beginning of the descent into the self. It is only when one has already been touched by grace that it is possible to bear the pain of compunction and its accompanying self-knowledge.<sup>28</sup>

What are the implications of the notion of compunction for the pastoral counseling process?

In the first place, one of the central characteristics of the element of compunction is the experience of being pierced. It will be argued here that the experience of being pierced by one's experience is an important aspect of the pastoral counseling process.

One of the most important contributions of depth psychology to contemporary pastoral counseling is the understanding of the dynamic relationship between consciousness and the unconscious. The understanding of the human found in modern depth psychology also presumes a deepening process that takes place within the person. One of the primary goals of therapy is to facilitate this

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of the arrow opening for itself as it were a door and a passage way! For hardly does the soul feel itself struck by the arrow of love, when already its wound is transformed into nuptial joy." Cited in Bouyer, 367-68.

<sup>28</sup> Commenting on the relationship between self-knowledge and love, Alan Jones observes: "it is no use knowing certain apparently unacceptable things about ourselves . . . unless there is a way of being able to bear this knowledge. . . . Knowledge without love can lead to despair." See Jones, *Soul Making*, 87-88.

process.

It will be argued here that grace is the source of the deepening process in the human being. The basis of this dynamic is the hidden, uncovering action of the Holy Spirit seeking one out in the depths of one's being. Anyone who has undergone depth psychotherapy therapy is aware of the mysterious nature of the deepening process. Unbidden lures --in the form of dreams, images, and affect--appear, drawing one ever more deeply into the hidden reaches of one's personality. The assumption here is that the foundation for this deepening movement is theological. It rests on the notion that, in the experience of being pierced by one's experience, God is offering one the possibility of receiving one's self back, healed and whole.

The second aspect of the element of compunction that will be considered here is the understanding of compunction as sorrow for sin. It will be recalled that one of the modifications to the model of the prayer of the heart has to do with the understanding of sin. A different definition of sin was suggested, where sin is viewed as an expression of human woundedness. How does this revision affect the notion of compunction as sorrow for sin?

Another one of the key contributions of depth psychology to pastoral counseling is an understanding of the centrality of the therapeutic relationship to the healing process. The relationship between the client and the therapist forms the container for the therapy process.

Again, object relations theory provides a clue in comprehending the importance of this relationship. The relational nature of the self and the role of empathy in human development are crucial.

According to this view of human development, the source of human woundedness can be traced back to the damage done to the client's developing self when there was no big enough adult self present to empathize with the client, to contain the client's feelings and to help the client integrate his or her experience into a sense of self.<sup>29</sup> As a consequence, the client learned to repress or split off aspects of his or her experience and, ultimately, to deny the feeling self, the subject of these experiences.

However, these disowned aspects of the self do not simply cease to exist. Rather, they go underground, like lost souls or unbaptized innocents condemned to live in a state of limbo. Without the empathetic presence of another self that is big enough to contain one's experience and help one to integrate these bits and pieces of self, the most one can do is to preserve this inner treasure, to bury it and keep it hidden through the creation of a false self.<sup>30</sup>

Just as damage to the self occurs in a relational context, healing also occurs in the context of a relationship, the relationship between the client and the

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<sup>29</sup> For more on this theme, see Miller, 10-11.

<sup>30</sup> See Miller, 34.

therapist. The client's experience of the therapist's empathetic presence enables the client to begin to feel, the reconnect with his or her experience, to admit the disowned or banished parts of self into awareness.<sup>31</sup> Healing requires establishing an empathetic rather than an abusive relationship with one's self.

How do these two perspectives inform the pastoral counseling process?

Compassion is a biblical term as well as a prominent term in the teachings of the desert fathers and the prayer of the heart. It is close to the meaning of empathy as it is used here. The Hebrew notion of compassion as the womb of God is a powerful metaphor for the pastoral counseling process. Compassion is the ability and the willingness to feel with another human being.<sup>32</sup> One of the chief functions of the pastoral counselor is to embody compassionate presence to the client.

Embodying compassionate presence to the client presupposes that the pastoral counselor has done enough of his or her own inner work so that she or he has a big enough

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<sup>31</sup> See Miller, 21.

<sup>32</sup> Henri Nouwen argues that compassion is the basis of ministry: "[It] requires the inner disposition to go with others to the place where they are weak, vulnerable, lonely, and broken." He observes that one's spontaneous response to suffering is to run away from it or to try to problem-solve. However, he suggests that if one gives in to this impulse one ignores one's greatest gift, "which is [one's] ability to enter into solidarity with those who suffer." See Nouwen, 34.

sense of self to contain the process. To the extent that the pastoral counselor is able, she or he feels the client's feelings at the same level of depth or intensity with which the client experiences his or her feelings. The pastoral counselor allows the process to deepen, feeling the client's feelings when the client is unable to feel for him or herself.

The pastoral counselor is the human face of grace. She or he beholds the client through the eyes of grace, perceives the divine image shining through the layers of the false self, and reflects this image back to the client. The client is invited to reconnect with aspects of the self which have been denied. If the client accepts the invitation, she or he is drawn more deeply into his or her true self.

However, the process does not stop here. It is not only the client who is drawn into this deepening movement of grace. The pastoral counselor is drawn in as well. The deepening movement of grace is larger than client and pastoral counselor. It forms the theological container for the pastoral counseling process.

The gift of tears is closely related to the notion of compunction and occupies an important place in the prayer of the heart. Weeping for one's sins is the means of cleansing one's heart. How does this notion get translated into the pastoral counseling process?

Object relations theory makes a valuable contribution

toward understanding the function of tears in therapy. Tears are related to mourning. The client's capacity to mourn the loss of her or his childhood signifies the beginning of the healing process. It represents the client's ability to empathize with his or her true self.<sup>33</sup>

Tears and anger play an important role in the pastoral counseling process. Tears and anger are an expression of re-experiencing the pain of one's woundedness in a safe and compassionate setting. The client needs to mourn his or her wounds or the wounds she or he may have inflicted on others. She or he needs to be angry at the injustice done to her or him or the injustice in the world. Here, the role of the pastoral counselor is to mourn and be angry with the client, expressing God's mourning and outrage at oppression in the world.

The above stance reflects another modification of certain aspects of the prayer of the heart to fit a contemporary model of pastoral counseling. Within the dualistic anthropology of the prayer of the heart anger is viewed as one of the passions and, thus, a source of sin. As such, anger is to be avoided. This study, on the other hand, argues that salvation is through the passions, the totality of human experience, including anger. Contemporary psychotherapy has made an important contribution to pastoral counseling in emphasizing the role of anger in the healing

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<sup>33</sup> For more on the theme of empathy and mourning, see Miller, 15.

process.

The theological grounds for this perspective are readily discovered: God is on the side of the oppressed and stands over against the oppressor. The pastoral counselor expresses solidarity with the oppressed aspects of the client, inviting the client to stand with this part of his or her self. There are social implications for this view, as well. The pastoral counselor is not limited to taking a stand against injustice in the context of the counseling session. She or he is also called to take a stand against injustice in the outer world.

If sin is interpreted as human woundedness, as suggested here, then the notion of sorrow for sin takes on a whole new--and much more powerful--meaning when applied to the pastoral counseling process. In the prayer of the heart weeping for one's sins is seen as the starting point of the ascetical life. The same thing could be said of the pastoral counseling process. The words, "the pastoral counselor," could easily be substituted for "the monk" in the following statement: "The monk is known as 'one who mourns,' a specialist in compunction."<sup>34</sup> The pastoral counselor mourns with the client the damage done to the client's self.

#### Clinical Illustration

The client here is a woman in her late thirties. She

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<sup>34</sup> Hausherr, *Name of Jesus*, 242.

entered into pastoral counseling for a number of reasons including lack of a sense of self, low self-esteem, an extremely critical inner voice, and occasional impulses to hurt herself. She also reported having difficulty in relationships.

This client came from a dysfunctional family where her parents were continually at odds with each other. Her role in the family system was to hold things together. The family's style of relating to each other was to be very critical of one another. Any vulnerability was seen as weakness.

During the course of therapy it gradually emerged that the client was an incest survivor. She did not have specific memories of abuse, but a number of symptoms were present. One of the most striking symptoms was the overwhelming sadness that would overtake her from time to time. In an attempt to outdistance the sadness, much of her energy was spent in distracting herself from feeling. When it did eventually catch up with her, the sadness threatened to overwhelm her. Her fear was that it was bottomless. She would cry for hours, but she couldn't cry hard enough to cry it out.

The focus of the pastoral counseling process was on building up her sense of self by receiving and validating her experience. On a regular basis the client would bring in a roll of butcher paper that contained drawings she had done. They told the story of her inner life. Several



images stand out.

One drawing was from a dream she had had. It was of a sea, calm and peaceful. The sea was a beautiful, brilliant green, but lifeless, with deadly black patches. She commented that the ocean was empty and lifeless. The black patches were the feelings inside that she has tried to swim around. What she has been doing in counseling is sidling up to the black patches. Somehow that makes a dent in the lifelessness. In order to keep out of the black patches, she has had to not feel things. The irony is that the black patches appear sinister and threatening, but that is where the life is.

Another drawing from a dream is of a desert. There is a sense of emptiness and not knowing where to go. There are ladders that don't go anywhere.

Close to this image there is a drawing of a bleeding heart, lying on hot cobblestones under a hot, angry sun. The heart represents her feelings, exposed and dying, no protection from the sun.

Then there is a drawing of a small figure crouched down with large disapproving figures looming over her. The figure is crying and a pool of tears has formed. Next to the pool of tears are little green plants. These are her companions. They symbolize the life that comes with feeling the sadness.

Finally, there is a drawing of a dream she had about a dying deer fawn. In the dream the fawn was so mangled that

she didn't even recognize it at first. It was still alive, but a mess. The theme of many of her drawings is that all that is tender, new and alive in her gets mangled. Violence, brutality and unfeeling prevail in her inner world.

### Asceticism: Consenting to the Deepening

#### Movement of Grace

The goal of the prayer of the heart is union with God in a state of pure prayer or contemplation. Ascent to contemplation is through the active life, asceticism. Asceticism is not an end in itself. Rather, the goal of asceticism is to increase one's responsiveness to grace.<sup>35</sup>

Asceticism is "the spiritual method for cleansing the affective part of the soul."<sup>36</sup> It provides a framework for the process of consenting to the deepening movement of grace within one. Negatively, it is a process of purification or purgation, the removal of the layers of the false self, a liberation from the forces of denial.<sup>37</sup> Positively, the

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<sup>35</sup> In his "Preface" to *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh observes that the essence of the teachings of the desert fathers is the belief that "to be . . . means to be loved by God." Thus, at its core, the ascetic endeavor is "an endeavour to respond to love for love." It is to be "possessed of such a love, that nothing less than one's whole being could respond to it." See *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, trans. Benedicta Ward (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Pub., 1975), xiv, xv-xvi.

<sup>36</sup> Evagrius Ponticus, *Praktikos*, 36.

<sup>37</sup> Countering a common misperception, Alan Jones argues that "the purpose of purgation is always remedial and never punitive." See Jones, *Soul Making*, 170.

Ann and Barry Ulanov speak of purgation as a process of

stripping away of the outer layers of the self permits a gradual penetration of grace into the interior regions. The prayer of the heart is exposure to the deepening movement of grace within one.

What relevance does this understanding of asceticism have for contemporary pastoral counseling?

The prayer of the heart teaches that the goal of the life of prayer is union with God, and that the way to this goal is through asceticism. This perspective has important implications for understanding the pastoral counseling process.

The notion that the goal of the life of prayer is union with God recalls Thayer's definition of spirit as the human capacity for union with the transcendent. If the pastoral counseling process is a process of spiritual formation, then the ultimate end of the process is theological--union with God. The renewed interest in spirituality commented upon by various writers in Chapter 1 suggests that more people today are seeking out some sort of experience of union or transcendence. The question is, how does one reach the goal of union with God?

In its teachings concerning the role of asceticism in the spiritual formation process, the prayer of the heart has something of significance to offer contemporary pastoral

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liberation in which "we remove the chains that have kept our unconscious prisoner and lost us direct access to its precious contents, good and bad." See Ulanov and Ulanov, *Primary Speech*, 111.

counseling. One of the most important contributions the prayer of the heart can make to contemporary pastoral counseling is its understanding of the role of human effort in the spiritual formation process. Here is another paradox. Human effort is central to the spiritual formation process. However, it is always understood in the context of grace. The core of asceticism is the "work" of consenting to the deepening movement of grace in one's life.

Human effort needs a context, a container. The understanding of the ascetical life found in the prayer of the heart provides a structure for the spiritual formation process. As several of the theologians cited in Chapter 1 pointed out, methods of deepening religious life or models of spiritual formation have been lacking in Protestantism.<sup>38</sup> The contemporary pastoral counseling movement, being primarily a Protestant phenomenon, reflects this.

The majority of the sources of asceticism in contemporary life come from the various psychotherapies. In contemporary pastoral counseling probably the dominant model of formation comes from depth psychology. Modern depth psychology resembles the prayer of the heart in that both are formation processes, providing a structure as well as methods for deepening human interiority. They are also alike in that each recognizes the degree of human effort called for in the deepening process.

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<sup>38</sup> See Browning, *Moral Context of Pastoral Care*, 116-18; see also, Edwards, 29-32.

### Spiritual Warfare: The Denial of Denial

In the prayer of the heart spiritual warfare is the process of overcoming the obstacles to contemplation. The chief obstacles are thoughts, the imagination and the passions. It is through the passions that sin enters the heart. Earlier, this understanding of the passions as the source of sin was criticized as dualistic. Instead, it was suggested that salvation is through the totality of human experience. With this modification, what does the notion of spiritual warfare have to offer a contemporary model of pastoral counseling?

Because of its outdated and dualistic worldview, the notion of spiritual warfare may seem irrelevant or objectionable to people today. However, it will be argued that with the modifications suggested above, the concept of spiritual warfare conveys important psychological and theological truths. In the understanding of the pastoral counseling process presented here, spiritual warfare is a metaphor for the inner struggle which transpires when the forces of denial come into conflict with the deepening movement of grace within the client. One of the most important contributions of depth psychology to pastoral counseling is an increased understanding of the dynamics involved in this internal conflict.

In the pastoral counseling process denial is the primary obstacle to the deepening movement of grace within

the client. Sin is the denial of the true self.<sup>39</sup> Denial is one's No!, the part of one that opposes God. Denial is saying No! to the deepening movement of grace within one.<sup>40</sup>

Denial is a movement of disconnection, of dissociation.<sup>41</sup> Denial is violence against the self. It is a stance of opposition to grace. Here, spiritual warfare is seen as an attitude of non-violence, the denial of denial. Repentance is refusal to do further violence to self or neighbor. Hence, engaging in spiritual warfare implies

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<sup>39</sup> Alan Jones defines sin as a refusal to grow. He adds: "Sin is a sort of willful forgetfulness of how great and wonderful we are. It seduces us into thinking that we have to be our own creators. . . . It lays upon us terrible burdens." See Jones, *Soul Making*, 3.

In a similar vein, Thomas Merton refers to sin as "the spirit of rebellious refusal" arising out of infidelity to self. The experience is one of having been untrue to "one's own inmost truth." In other words, "one is living a lie." According to Merton, the monk or contemplative's chief service to the world lies in confronting denial in the self as well as in the world. See Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, 96, 24, 24.

<sup>40</sup> Ann and Barry Ulanov's formulation of prayer as the denial of denial suggests how aspects of the pastoral counseling process can be understood as spiritual warfare. Given their definition of prayer as primary speech, they argue that "every denial of that reality [one's primary speech], every judgment or retreat from it that shuts off access to it is a serious diminishing of ourselves. It is, in fact, a kind of refusal to be." See Ulanov and Ulanov, *Primary Speech*, 6.

<sup>41</sup> Feminist theologian Carter Heyward views violence as a problem of disconnection. She emphasizes that, as human beings, we live in a relational matrix. Heyward observes that "it is only in 'mutually empathic and empowering' relationships that our well-being can be secured and sustained." See Carter Heyward, *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), 13.

taking a stand against the forces of violence or denial.<sup>42</sup>

The notion of spiritual warfare reflects the profound view of sin found in the prayer of the heart. The Macarian *Homilies* emphasize the serious effects of sin on human beings. Sin is radical and persistent. It is mixed or mingled in the heart. Human beings are divided, at war within themselves. Sin cannot be rooted out by human effort. Only grace can counter the effects of sin. Even after the coming of grace sin still persists in the soul, hence, the need for perseverance in prayer. The astute psychology underlying Evagrian doctrine teaches that human beings must be altered in the depths of their hearts.

This perspective on the profoundness of the effects of sin is consistent with insights from contemporary depth psychology. Object relations theory has contributed to understanding how human beings come to be wounded at their core. Because of the relational nature of the self, human beings are vulnerable to being wounded early in their development. Hence, there is a need for methods of healing that penetrate to the core of the self. The depth and extent of damage, or the fixedness or stubbornness of "sin," often requires a lengthy healing process. Hence, in this respect there is more similarity between the perspectives of

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<sup>42</sup> Alan Jones contrasts the desert way of spirituality with what he characterizes as the "terrorist spirituality" of much of religion. He sees desert spirituality as "anti-terrorist activity on behalf of the human soul." See Jones, *Soul Making*, 37.

the prayer of the heart and modern depth psychology than between the prayer of the heart and models of brief therapy.

One way of understanding the incarnational dimension of the pastoral counseling process is to see it as a process in which the client assumes her or his humanity. The invitation is to assume what has been denied, the fullness of one's humanity. The process of incarnation, assuming one's humanity, occurs through the descent into self, the depth dimension in human experience.

Many Christians have difficulty with this view of prayer and spirituality. When such people enter pastoral counseling their goal is often to get rid of troublesome aspects of their personality. They would just as soon kill off these parts of themselves. Much of traditional theology reinforces this attitude of violence toward the self.

Various metaphors are used to depict this process of assuming one's humanity.

The metaphor of entering the desert is often used to describe the process of the descent into self. This metaphor can also be applied to the pastoral counseling process. As a client enters his or her depths, it is common for him or her to experience God's absence. The client often feels abandoned and betrayed by God. During the course of counseling the client may experience a sense of lostness or lack of direction echoing the Hebrew people's wilderness experience. A client's previous understanding of God may no longer fit his or her present reality. However,



a new vision of God has not yet emerged.<sup>43</sup>

Christ's descent into hell is also an apt metaphor for the process of the descent into self.<sup>44</sup> Earlier on, the metaphor of limbo was used to describe the bits and pieces of banished self existing in the depths of the client. As long as these bits and pieces of banished self are not assumed, the client remains alienated from her or his truth. Covered over by the layers of the false self, the inner jewel of the true self lies frozen in the deepest circle of hell.

The metaphor of Christ's descent into hell suggests that Christ is one's companion in the inward journey to the heart through the layers of denial. This journey is one of assuming one's humanity, of feeling or suffering with the self. The experience of compassionate presence, of solidarity with one's self even as one descends into the depths of one's suffering, lies at the core of the pastoral counseling process.

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<sup>43</sup> Marion Woodman, Jungian analyst, applies the metaphor of the desert to the process of psychotherapy: "The setting [of therapy] is in the desert. Biblically the desert is a chrysalis, a vast expanse of transitional upheaval. For forty years Moses and the Israelites were crossing the desert; for forty days Jesus was alone in the wilderness. The old life had been left behind; the new was yet to come; between was the dislocation that opened the spiritual depths." See Woodman, 187.

<sup>44</sup> Along this line, Thomas Merton observes: "There is a 'movement' [emphasis mine] of meditation, expressing the basic 'paschal' rhythm of the Christian life, the passage from death to life in Christ. Sometimes prayer, meditation and contemplation are 'death'--a kind of descent." See Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, 34.

In Christian theology one of the names for Satan is the Adversary. The notion of spiritual warfare against Satan is a metaphor for the struggle against the forces of violence. What is the role of the pastoral counselor in this conflict?

Because the client is unable to be faithful to his or her true self, she or he needs an advocate, someone--the pastoral counselor--who will be faithful to his or her true self, the image of God. She or he needs someone who will stand up and oppose the forces of denial in him or her. This is the role of the pastoral counselor. The process of pastoral counseling is a journey of descent through the layers of denial in search of the jewel of the true self hidden in the depths of the client.

As men in the trade go naked into the depths of the sea, into the watery death, to find those pearls that will do for a royal crown, and purple dye, so those who live the monastic life go naked out of the world, and go down into the sea of evil and into the gulf of darkness, and from these depths they take and bring up precious stones suitable for the crown of Christ, for the heavenly Church, for a new world, and a city of light, and people of angels.<sup>45</sup>

#### Clinical Illustration

The client is a woman in her late thirties. At the beginning of the pastoral counseling process she had just received her final divorce papers after fifteen years of marriage. She is in ministry, but questions her vocation. Her reasons for seeking counseling include depression, relationships, and life direction.

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<sup>45</sup> Macarius, cited in Louth, 125.

Unresolved family of origin issues presented themselves early on in the counseling process. While she was a child, the client's role was to take care of her mother emotionally. There was little room for her own emotional needs, which she learned to either submerge or attempt to meet indirectly. Her father was emotionally distant and critical of her spirituality.

The focus of the counseling moved back and forth between issues related to her daily life and depth work. This client was adept at recording dreams, writing, and drawing. Her spirituality was an important aspect of the counseling. During the course of counseling the client recovered memories of childhood sexual abuse.

Toward the beginning of the process she shared a dream she sensed had something to do with her spirituality. It was a nightmare from which she woke up sobbing. In the dream she was wearing a dark coat. When she opened up the coat all sorts of terrible things would come flying out, including monsters and demons. What was worse, at the center was a black hole, emptiness. There was no God in the emptiness.

In the next session the client brought in a drawing of the terrible emptiness. There was a circle shaded black on the inside with a black line spiraling toward the center. When asked to describe what this meant to her, an image came to her of darkness like a funnel. In response to direction from the pastoral counselor, she closed her eyes and

described the image. She was on the inside of the funnel hanging onto the edge. She was tired of hanging on, but terrified of falling into the darkness. She was not sure what was at the bottom of the funnel.

During the course of the counseling she discovered one of the things at the bottom of the funnel. She recovered painful memories of childhood sexual abuse. At the same time, she was able to recognize that her pastor, who had been her mentor, had sexually molested her. In both instances, an important part of her healing involved expressing the rage and sadness she felt at the violation and betrayal she had experienced.

She talked about how all of this had affected her spirituality. When she attended church her primary experience was of rage and sadness. She feels like the rug has been pulled out from under her. She had an image of herself, alone, walking down the railroad tracks into the future. The therapist commented that she had lost her bearings and asked, what about following her longing? There is no longer a context for her longing. In the past, the one secure place in her life was her spirituality, her relationship with God. Now this is up in the air, too. Her faith is no longer big enough to contain her suffering and the suffering she encounters in the world.

During this time, she experienced a profound sense of God's absence, stating that she had lost her faith. She knows what she does not believe, but she is not sure what

she does believe. She remarked that this was even more painful than the sexual abuse. Part of her has died. At this point, the counseling focused on mourning. She wrote a "Lamentation" as part of the mourning process.

Struggling with the lack of meaning in her life, she cried that she has no place of passion any longer. The pastoral counselor suggested that her place of passion is in her anger and in her questions. She replied that she was reluctant to commit herself to that dark place.

#### Health of the Soul: The Reintegration of the Self

The aim of asceticism is the healing of the disordered passions or emotions and the restoration of the healthy functioning of the soul. It is opposition to the forces in one that oppose charity. The goal of the ascetic life is liberation from the domination of the passions. The goal of asceticism, far from being the mutilation of the self, is purification or restoration of the divine image.

The goal of the asceticism is *apatheia*, a state of dispassion. It means "the health of the soul."<sup>46</sup> *Apatheia* is a state of deep calm resulting from the integration of the emotional life under the influence of the deepening movement of grace within one. This is similar to the meaning of the term *hesychia* in the prayer of the heart. *Hesychia* means peace or wholeness of heart, a state of deep,

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<sup>46</sup> Evagrius Ponticus, *Praktikos*, 31.

abiding calm or silence of the heart. However, *hesychia* is not a calm that results from the absence of conflict or from denial. Rather, it is a state of reintegration of the human psyche which has been split apart by internal division.

How does this apply to the pastoral counseling process?

Another important contribution of depth psychology to contemporary pastoral counseling is the belief that one of the most important goals of the therapy process is the recovery of the self. According to object relations theory, one of the most profound wounds the client experiences is the loss of self.<sup>47</sup>

The core of the pastoral counseling process is a descent into self in response to the hidden, uncovering action of the Holy Spirit seeking one out in the depths of one's being. Negatively, this is expressed through the notion of spiritual warfare, opposition to the forces of denial in the client. The descent into self involves stripping away the layers of the false self, which is, paradoxically, the same process as exposure to grace. Positively, the descent into self is a process of incarnation, where the client assumes his or her humanity. The client is invited back into her or his self. It is a process of integration. The goal is the recovery of the self.

As a consequence of this deepening process, the client

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<sup>47</sup> See Miller, 30.

experiences an expansion of self.<sup>48</sup> More self, more of one's experience, becomes available. One becomes less defended and more open and flexible.<sup>49</sup> One's self becomes more complex. One can hold more conflicting feelings. There is more room inside, for others as well as for self. One's capacity for compassion, for feeling with self and others is increased. One experiences a sense of solidarity with self and others.<sup>50</sup>

Psychological health or wholeness is not the same thing as salvation. The active life, asceticism, is preparation for contemplation. The goal of asceticism, *apatheia*, is understood as the health of the soul, the reintegration of the disordered emotions. Yet, *apatheia* is not sufficient for complete health. The goal of the prayer of the heart is contemplation, experimental knowledge of God.

It will be recalled from Chapter 1 that one of the key issues facing the contemporary pastoral counseling movement

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<sup>48</sup> Ann and Barry Ulanov observe that the Hebrew root of the word *yasha'* means "to deliver from battle." It carries connotations of breadth of being, spaciousness of self. See Ulanov and Ulanov, *Religion and the Unconscious*, 17.

<sup>49</sup> Douglas Steere recounts the following story: "Dogen, the founder of the Soto school of Japanese Zen Buddhism, on his return in 1227 from spending many years in China with great Zen masters, was asked what he had learned in all of this time he had been away. Dogen replied: 'O nothing much, just softness of heart!'" See Steere, *Together in Solitude*, 102.

<sup>50</sup> Along this same line, Douglas Steere suggests that "the ground of solidarity [and] the ground of interior prayer [are] one and the same." Steere, *Together in Solitude*, 104.

is the question, what is the difference between psychological wholeness and salvation? In many respects modern depth psychology provides a rich model for the pastoral counseling process. Insights from depth psychology have critiqued and modified the understanding of the human found in the prayer of the heart. However, as will be seen in the following section, the prayer of the heart has something unique to offer contemporary pastoral counseling in the way of understanding the theological goal of the process of spiritual formation. It is this understanding of the ultimate goal of spiritual formation as union with God in the state of contemplation that distinguishes pastoral counseling from other varieties of counseling.

#### Contemplation: The Self-in-God

Mind-in-heart prayer, the goal of the prayer of the heart is a process of self-transcendence and union with the divine. It signifies the movement from outward prayer to inward prayer. The discipline of bringing the mind down from the head into the heart is a method of integration, connecting conscious awareness with the depth dimension. It signifies the unification of the personality. Mind-in-heart prayer is a process of transformation. One is changed in one's depths through the exposure to grace. However, the process does not stop here. The goal of the prayer of the heart is a state of continual prayer, the integration of prayer with life. This is a stance of continually consenting to the deepening movement of grace in the depths



of the universe.

### Progress in Prayer: A Model of Spiritual Formation

The Protestant tradition, including the field of pastoral counseling, has largely been cut off from models of growth in the spiritual life. With the rise of the modern psychologies, pastoral counseling has, for the most part, been dependent upon psychological models of human growth and development. The integration of psychological models into the theory and practice of pastoral counseling is not the issue here. Contemporary psychology and psychotherapy have contributed greatly to the field of pastoral counseling. However, it will be argued here that a theological model of human growth and development is equally important.

In the prayer of the heart, the theme of progress in prayer is grounded in the notion of God as the dimension of depth in human experience. Spiritual formation is viewed as a process of deepening. This understanding is related to the notion of transcendence as depth.

Deepening is a process of transcending self. Self-transcendence, however, is not the same thing as self-denial, in the meaning of denial referred to above. Rather, deepening is the transcendence of the false self and the acceptance of the invitation back into one's true self. It was stated previously that consenting or surrendering to the deepening movement of grace feels like dying. Consent is the surrendering of the false self and the acceptance of a new self emerging in grace.

In the prayer of the heart, progress in prayer is seen as a process of divinization or sanctification. Divinization is the restoration of the divine image in the human being. It is the process of consenting to the deepening movement of grace within one. In this understanding of the pastoral counseling process, perfection or divinization is interpreted as a process of incarnation, assuming one's full humanity. The language of perfection or divinization may sound strange to people today. However, it conveys an important truth, the belief that one's self is of ultimate value, that the divine image at one's core is what defines who one is.

Human spiritual longing is a response to an invitation, the invitation to go deeper into self and the universe. It is a longing for one's self. But, it is more than that. It is a longing for self-in-relationship, for meeting. Growth is deepening-in-relationship. Deepening begins in relationship, not in isolation. Consenting to the deepening movement of grace within one is a process of self-disclosure. One throws off the layers of the false self in response to an invitation to encounter another in grace.

The theme of progress in prayer is related to the issue of direction. Many clients experience a sense of lostness or emptiness in their lives. Lack of direction is often part of their presenting problem. Direction is related to depth. The depth dimension in human experience is the source of meaning and value in one's life. If one is cut

off from one's depths, one is cut off from the source of direction in one's life. The assumption here is that direction in one's life is discovered in the depths.<sup>51</sup> Direction is discovered in response to the dynamic of grace.

The theme of progress in prayer raises some important issues for consideration. There are dangers associated with the notion of progressive stages in the life of prayer. Since the time of the Reformation Protestants have been suspicious of Roman Catholic ascetical theology. The perception has been that the simple command to follow Christ has become overlaid with degrees and stages, thus turning spirituality into a burdensome work and, hence, the enemy of grace. In many respects, this has been true.

However, Protestants have also, at times, turned justification by faith into a matter of human effort.<sup>52</sup> The problem for many Protestants is that the words, "through grace," are left out of the formula all too often. Belief is turned into a matter of conscious willing. The misperception is that all one has to do is to obey the injunction to believe. The difficulty for many is that this position ignores or discounts the depth of the conflicting forces at work within one. There is little help available

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<sup>51</sup> Tom Hart, spiritual director and pastoral counselor, states: "It is to the depths of ourselves that we must listen to find our life direction." See Hart, 115.

<sup>52</sup> For more on this theme, see Jones, *Soul Making*, 168-69.

as far as models of spiritual formation. This is where the prayer of the heart provides a resource for contemporary people, a framework for the spiritual journey.

### Clinical Illustration

The client in this instance is a man in his early thirties, married for approximately ten years. He is bright, a college graduate, but under employed. His presenting problem is related to career choice. He has been feeling pressured to find a job that will bring in a more adequate income. A second problem involves his relationship with his father.

His parents divorced when he was small, and he lived with his mother. His father was generally very critical of him. He learned to respond to his father's criticism by agreeing with him, but withdrawing emotionally. To his dismay, he finds himself responding in a similar way toward his spouse. One of his reasons for seeking counseling is that if he ever has children, he does not want to pass his wounds on to his own children.

His majored in art in college and this remains his primary interest. However, he cannot support a family on what he makes from his art. His family has suggested various career options which he has pursued. He does not experience any emotional connection with these options. He is cut off from any sense of inner direction. Even in his art he tends to be somewhat emotionally distant, an observer.

When he discovered that he could not make a living from his art, he felt like a failure. He believes that all he has to offer his spouse now is financial support. One of the goals of counseling is for him to recognize that he has more to offer, namely, the gift of his passion. However, he has to uncover this gift before he can offer it to anyone else. The counseling process is about unwrapping the gift of his person, with all of its complexity, richness, and depth.

The Degrees of Prayer: From Surface  
to Depth

In the prayer of the heart, the theme of progress in prayer is expressed in the notion of the degrees of prayer: the prayer of the lips, the prayer of the mind, and the prayer of the heart. This notion conveys a sense of the deepening movement of grace within the person. The movement through the various degrees or stages of prayer symbolizes the movement from outward prayer to inward prayer:

You must pray not only with words but with the mind, and not only with the mind but with the heart, so that the mind understands and sees clearly what is said in words, and the heart feels what the mind is thinking. All these combined together constitute real prayer, and if any of them are absent your prayer is either not perfect, or is not prayer at all.<sup>53</sup>

The movement from outward prayer to inward prayer is another way of talking about the deepening of self that lies at the core of the pastoral counseling process. Just as in

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<sup>53</sup> Theophan the Recluse, "What is Prayer?" 67.

prayer, in the pastoral counseling process the movement from situations in daily life to the depth dimension is a movement of connection and integration.

The prayer of the heart teaches that it is not sufficient to remain in the head. It is necessary to descend from the head into the heart. One of the strengths of the prayer of the heart is that it is a holistic and integrative model. The prayer of the heart includes non-rational aspects of human experience without abandoning the intellect. One's awareness deepens to include the depth dimension. Consciousness is grounded in the deeper self.

Part of the power of the model is that there is no limit to deepening. The final degree of prayer, the prayer of ecstasy, points to human longing for an experience of being drawn out of self into an other, an experience of mystical union.

#### Mind-in-Heart Prayer: A Method of

##### Integration

The notion of mind-in-heart prayer, which is so central to the Orthodox doctrine of contemplative prayer, has much to offer contemporary people and the field of pastoral counseling.<sup>54</sup> Mind-in-heart prayer is a method of

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<sup>54</sup> Kenneth Leech argues that part of the importance of the apophatic tradition, including the prayer of the heart, is the assumption of the unity of mind and heart in the spiritual quest. He observes: "It is this unity, of the mind within the heart, which is so central to the Eastern understanding of all spiritual theology, which, after the twelfth century, was being lost in Western Christianity, and which is still in urgent need of reaffirmation today." See

integration. It involves the integration of the emotional life with the intellectual life. It signifies the marriage of mind and heart. It is a method for connecting conscious awareness with the depth dimension. It is about the unification of the personality. Yet, mind-in-heart prayer extends beyond the concerns of the individual. The ultimate goal of mind-in-heart prayer is union with creation and the divine through grace.

The core of mind-in-heart prayer is the process of bringing the mind down from the head into the heart. Bringing the mind down from the head into the heart involves entering the dark heart, the hidden inner abyss, the depth dimension in human experience. In this process the illusions and defenses of the false self are stripped away. It is a time of being in the darkness. Unconscious forces make their hidden powers felt.

Bringing the mind down from the head into the heart results in a shift in one's center. One's center has moved from the surface to the deeper regions of the personality. In psychological language, one lives from a center deeper than the conscious ego.

Bringing the mind down from the head into the heart requires a shift in attitude from one of denial and control to one of consent and surrender. It is an attitude of

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Leech, *Experiencing God*, 175.

receptivity, an inner listening.<sup>55</sup>

In the prayer of the heart, sobriety is the inward state of interior silence or purity of heart that leads to true poverty of spirit. Spiritual poverty or self-emptying is a state of active receptivity, an inner silence of the heart which is a precondition for hearing the word of God within one.<sup>56</sup> In order to grow in perfection, one needs silence on this deeper level. Receptivity, inner listening, is an attitude of openness toward the hidden action of the Holy Spirit.

Sobriety is the path that leads to contemplation. It has been compared to the ladder of Jacob: "Sobriety is rightly called a way, for it leads to the Kingdom."<sup>57</sup> The concept of sobriety, understood here as consent to the deepening movement of grace, reflects the apophatic dimension of the prayer of the heart.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Thomas Merton speaks of contemplation as "a deep and simpler intuitive form of receptivity." See Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, 44.

<sup>56</sup> Douglas Steere comments on the need for silence and solitude in the life of prayer: "For until I have then been brought in solitude to the very ground of my being, where I am beyond the grip of my surface self with all of its plans and distractions, I am not able to heart the divine whisper." See Steere, *Together in Solitude*, 92.

<sup>57</sup> Philotheus of Sinai, 324.

<sup>58</sup> Contemporary writers on contemplative prayer reflect a similar perspective. Alan Jones speaks of this descent into darkness as the "journey into Christ": "The formlessness, the emptiness, the void--these are unavoidable, and are the various words used to denote that which lies at the heart of human consciousness. The great mystics have struggled to describe it. Depth psychology has



What does this all mean for the pastoral counseling process?

Bringing the mind down from the head into the heart signifies the deepening of awareness in the client, resulting in an increased sense of connection between daily life and the depth dimension.

Bringing the mind down from the head into the heart involves finding the place of the heart. One's heart is where one's inner treasure is, the true self, one's Yes!. Finding the place of the heart is a metaphor for the process of following the clues or lures leading to the true self. These clues or lures are the bits and pieces of banished self that catch one's attention and draw one deeper into one's self. They come to one as gifts of grace. They present to one the possibility of a self healed and whole where nothing is lost. They come to one through the grace of God who offers one back one's self. This is the hidden

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helped us to enter it creatively. It is the place of the Spirit, the arena in which the self emerges. The infinite emptiness of the human heart is first experienced as terror. When we are content to wait, it is transformed into an eager emptiness waiting to be filled." See Alan W. Jones, *Journey into Christ* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), 21.

Thomas Merton speaks of the "way" of contemplation: "The contemplative way is, in fact, not a way. Christ alone is the way, and he is invisible. The 'desert' of contemplation is simply a metaphor to explain the state of emptiness which we experience when we have left all ways, forgotten ourselves and taken the invisible Christ as our way." See Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, 92. Merton quotes St. John of the Cross on the contemplative way: "Wherefore upon this road, to enter upon the road is to leave the road; or to express it better, it is to pass on to the goal and to leave one's way and to enter upon that which has no way, which is God." See Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, 92-93.

action of the Holy Spirit seeking one out in the depths of one's heart.

Mind-in-heart prayer is a method for the unification of the personality, the recovery of the true self. It is the discipline of presence to self. One learns to welcome more and more of one's self into awareness without putting up one's defenses. Mind-in-heart prayer requires learning to tolerate difficult feelings for the sake of the true self, rather than narrowing and restricting one's consciousness. Mind-in-heart prayer is holding at one's center, being present to one's experience, rather than splitting off or denying aspects of one's experience and thereby doing violence to one's self. It means staying with the interior conflict until one's self becomes big enough to contain one's experience.

The fruit of mind-in-heart prayer is being able to feel one's feelings with one's whole self. Contemplative knowledge, knowledge that comes through deepening, is knowledge of the whole person, the heart. It is knowledge that arises out of connection rather than disconnection.

#### Clinical Illustration

The client here is a single woman in her late twenties. Her reasons for seeking pastoral counseling include: incest as a child, nightmares, guilt, anger towards her father, and a desire to understand God's forgiveness. She is a youth worker in a local church and is considering going to seminary.

The counseling has focused on a variety of issues including family of origin issues, current relationships, healing from the sexual abuse, and her relationship with God.

The following is an example of how her relationship with God is connected to her other issues. She describes trying to pray and nothing happens: "It's like trying to force something that's not there." The pastoral counselor replied that nothing is happening because she is not paying attention to what is there. She replied that what is there is her relationship with her father. God seems so distant from this. She then read a letter she had written to her father. As she was reading the letter, she got in touch with the same sick feeling she gets anytime she tries to read about sexual abuse. The pastoral counselor encouraged her to stay with her feelings, stressing that God addresses her through her feelings. She has been searching for God outside of herself when all the time God is speaking to her in the midst of her experience.

The following is an example of bringing the mind down from the head into the heart in a session of pastoral counseling.

At the beginning of a session, this same client commented that she had made the decision not to cut off her feelings the way she had done the previous session. She began talking about what was going on in her life. As she talked she began to get in touch with some feelings. When

this happened she shut down emotionally. The pastoral counselor asked her to notice when she started to shut down. What was she aware of in her body? She reported that she could feel as far down as her chest, but below that her awareness stopped.

The pastoral counselor asked her to notice where her feeling was blocked. What was blocking? She replied, pain. (This is where she shut down during the last session. She knew there was pain there and she did not want to feel it.) After pain, the next thing that popped into her mind was fear. She was afraid that her friends will get tired of her being depressed. The pastoral counselor responded that she is uncomfortable with making demands on her friends, having to depend on others. She immediately flashed to a relationship with a male colleague by whom she feels betrayed. All the painful feelings around this surfaced.

The pastoral counselor suggested that she has some issues to work on regarding trust and betrayal. She can only see her side: She does not want to do anything to drive her friends away. She has a hard time seeing the other half of the equation: Can she really trust her friends enough to be vulnerable with them, to expose her needy self? A related issue is control versus surrender.

In this session the client's awareness shifted from her head, her ordinary conscious defended state of awareness, into her heart, her more open, feeling state. Her awareness expanded to included aspects of her experience which were

previously excluded from her awareness. However, she did not become irrational. Rather, the center of her awareness moved to a deeper level of experience.

#### Divinization: A Model of Transformation

The spiritual core of the pastoral counseling process is the deepening movement of grace within the person, the inward journey to the heart. It is a process of divinization, the uncovering of the image of God that has become obscured by the layers of denial.

The pastoral counseling process is a process of transformation or transfiguration. The core of any model of pastoral counseling is its theory of change. In this model, the basis for change is the dynamic of grace within the person. Change or transfiguration is understood within the context of spiritual formation, the process of consenting to this deepening movement of grace.

Prayer is exposure to grace. It is a "school of love,"<sup>59</sup> or "preparation to 'bear the beams of love.'"<sup>60</sup> The removal of the layers of denial permits a gradual penetration of grace into the interior reaches of the person. Human beings are a gift from God. Prayer is the process of unwrapping the treasure, becoming who one is as a child of God.

To pray, to consent to the deepening movement of grace

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<sup>59</sup> Jones, *Soul Making*, 2.

<sup>60</sup> Douglas Steere, foreword to *Contemplative Prayer*, by Thomas Merton, 9.

within one, is to open oneself to the possibility of change. Human beings construct defenses to hide from the beams of love. Prayer is a stance of non defensiveness, of dismantling one's defenses and surrendering to grace.

Prayer assumes an attitude of willingness to accept the changes that come as a result of prayer. One risks major changes in the process of taking many small steps.<sup>61</sup>

The power of this model is its perspective of life as a spiritual journey. The prayer of the heart is a model of spiritual formation. Life is about transformation. Transformation is a process, a process which is frustratingly slow at times. However, one has a lifetime in which to learn.

The pastoral counselor meets the client where she or he is, just as God meets one where one is. Grace is present in the invitation go deeper. While it is the pastoral counselor's role to facilitate the deepening process, it is the client's choice to accept or refuse the invitation.

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<sup>61</sup> John Cobb touches on the problem of change in his discussion of freedom and determinism: "Most of the feelings and behavior that characterize a human being at any moment are determined by the past. They are not subject to current choice. On the other hand, it is never the case that present feelings and behavior are exactly and totally determined by the past. In some measure they are being decided as they happen. Choice is a real factor. Furthermore, however tiny the effects of choice may be in any moment, cumulatively they can be quite large." See Cobb, "Pastoral Counseling and Theology," 26.

Continual Prayer: The Integration  
of Prayer with Life

The journey does not end in the depths. One enters the inner abyss to discover the treasure of the true self. However, the final stage of the journey is to bring the treasure into the outer world.<sup>62</sup> It is to live out of one's true self in one's daily life in the context of the human community. The ground of this connection between daily life and the depth dimension is the dynamic of grace in the universe. Thus, the prayer of the heart is not an escape from the world, but a means of entering the world--through one's own heart.

The goal of the prayer of the heart is prayer without ceasing. Continual prayer is a state of being, a state of the heart. What matters is the habitual disposition of the heart. Here, what is meant by habitual disposition of the heart is the attitude of consenting to the deepening movement of grace within one. It is this transformation of the habitual disposition of the heart that is the ultimate goal of the pastoral counseling process.

The notion of continual prayer, prayer without ceasing, points to the integration of prayer with life. This entails living from one's depths in one's daily life. Continual prayer only comes as a gift. It includes an awareness of

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<sup>62</sup> Marion Woodman describes this process: "It is the task of the ego to bring into daily reality what has been revealed in the desert, to bring the treasure home." See Woodman, 188.

the Holy Spirit praying within one. It is the ceaseless activity of grace seeking one out in the depths of one's being, calling one ever deeper into self, into world, into God. This is the final context of the pastoral counseling process.

Conclusion: A Theological Container for the Pastoral  
Counseling Process

The thesis of this study is that the prayer of the heart is a metaphor for the deepening movement of grace within the person. This dynamic of grace is the spiritual core of the pastoral counseling process. The prayer of the heart is a model for the deepening process that occurs in response to grace. This deepening process is a process of spiritual formation. It has been suggested here that the model of spiritual formation found in the prayer of the heart provides a theological container for the pastoral counseling process.

Just what does this mean?

One way of understanding the spiritual dimension of human experience is to see it as the deepening movement of grace within the person. Several of the theologians referred to in Chapter 1 raised the issue of the spiritual dimension of human experience in relation to the field of pastoral care and counseling. Tilden Edwards commented on the lack of an adequate bridge linking the depth of religious experience with daily life. Gerald May observed that scientific psychology is not large enough to contain



human spiritual longing. Nelson Thayer argued that the spiritual dimension is a fundamental category of human existence and that nurturing this dimension should be the central task of pastoral care today. The position represented here agrees with John Cobb that spirit is what distinguishes pastoral counseling from other varieties of counseling, although in this study spirit is interpreted differently.

What are some of the implications of this viewpoint?

In the first place, in the company of many of the theologians mentioned in Chapter 1, the position of this study is that the spiritual dimension, defined as the deepening movement of grace within the person, is a fundamental category of human existence. Hence, this dimension is present in all clients and is an aspect of all pastoral counseling.

This perspective has important implications for the pluralistic context of pastoral counseling. What distinguishes pastoral counseling from Christian counseling, on the one hand, and secular psychotherapy, on the other hand, is its theological core. The definition of what makes pastoral counseling pastoral is grounded in its dynamic core rather than in any explicitly religious content. The deepening movement of grace is at the center of the pastoral counseling process no matter what the content of the session.

This process of deepening in grace is not limited to

pastoral counseling. It may happen just as well in a session of secular psychotherapy. However, what is unique about pastoral counseling is that, for the pastoral counselor, this dynamic is at the center of the counseling process and provides the container for it. The position represented here agrees with Tilden Edwards that spiritual guidance is not just for Christians, but for all serious seekers. The advantage of the pastoral counselor is that she or she has a rich heritage to draw upon as far as understanding and facilitating the deepening process.

Another way of talking about the distinction between the explicit content of the counseling session and the process of deepening is to view the dynamic of grace the vertical dimension of human experience. It is the bridge between daily life and the depth dimension of human experience. This vertical dimension is present in every moment of daily life. It is the spirit breaking into human experience. The vertical or spiritual dimension is not some separate religious sphere isolated from the rest of life.

This definition of the spiritual dimension of pastoral counseling is compatible with a variety of different therapeutic modalities. Even those modalities that focus primarily upon problems of daily life are not automatically incompatible with the notion of deepening in grace. However, certain schools of psychotherapy are more compatible than others in that they explicitly address the depth dimension of human experience and include methods of

deepening. In this regard, depth psychology is the most compatible with the view of the pastoral counseling process presented here. It has been suggested that both depth psychology and the prayer of the heart are ways into human interiority and provide models for the deepening process. However, neither one, theological model nor psychological model, is exclusive when it comes to containing the deepening movement of grace. Each one suggests important insights into the deepening process, but they are not the only models to do so.

Finally, one of the important contributions of this understanding of the pastoral counseling process is its view of the relationship between the depths of the human being and the depths of God. The core of the human person, the heart, is seen as the potential for deepening. It is one's responsiveness to the divine. According to this understanding of the pastoral counseling process as spiritual formation, there are no limits to deepening. The ground of deepening is God, whose mysterious depths are beyond one, yet who comes to meet one just where one is.

There are no inherent conflicts between psychotherapy and pastoral counseling. In fact, much of secular therapy is grace-filled. However, pastoral counseling has the advantage in that its container is ultimately bigger.

This concludes the discussion of the prayer of the heart as a way in to human interiority. The next chapter will present some conclusions to the study.

## CHAPTER 5

### Conclusion

This chapter begins with a summary of the findings of the study. The second section presents key elements of the understanding of the pastoral counseling process developed here which serve as the basis for a set of criteria which can be used to evaluate models of pastoral counseling and psychotherapy. The third section addresses implications of this study with respect to the pluralistic context of pastoral counseling, especially the problem of religious language. The fourth section contains a summary of the contributions of the study. And, the final section is a statement of the limitations of the study and areas for further investigation.

#### Summary and Findings

One of the goals of this study has been to address the problem of the dominance of the psychological pole in pastoral counseling. The study began by situating the problem in its historical context. The dual nature of the contemporary pastoral counseling movement was pointed out. On the one hand, it has its roots in the ancient tradition of the cure of souls. On the other hand, it is a thoroughly modern discipline. It was also argued that, in its accommodation to modernity, contemporary pastoral counseling is a development of the liberal Protestant tradition in America. The primary contribution of the contemporary

pastoral counseling movement has been its adoption of modern psychology and psychotherapy in the task of soul cure. A commitment to the integration of psychology and theology has defined the field.

Various facets of the problem were highlighted. This was accomplished by presenting a number of critiques of contemporary pastoral care and counseling offered by theologians representing a variety of perspectives. While the positions of these writers diverge considerably with respect to their analyses of the problem and suggested solutions, they all agree that the dominance of the psychological pole in pastoral counseling poses a problem for the field.

The first critique examined the cultural context of the problem. The contention is that the dominance of the psychological pole in pastoral counseling is a reflection of changes in the culture. There has been a widespread conversion to psychology within American society. One of the consequences of this cultural shift is that modern psychology and psychotherapy have taken over the religious function of the cure of souls.

The second critique focused on the neglect of the theological pole in contemporary pastoral care and counseling. It was suggested that, as a result of the dominance of the psychological pole, pastoral counseling does not vary much from other varieties of counseling. One of the most critical consequences of the dominance of

psychological language and methods in the field has been the neglect of theological and historical sources, including traditional Christian language and imagery. The theologians referred to in this section cite the need for a genuinely theological definition of pastoral counseling, arguing that theology is what distinguishes pastoral counseling from other varieties of counseling. Their solutions vary, from advocating a more balanced use of psychological and theological sources to a neoclassical model of pastoral care.

The third critique dealt with the relation between pastoral counseling and spiritual direction. A group of writers from the field of spiritual direction argued that guidance in contemporary society has become psychologized. They pointed to the field of pastoral counseling as a good example of this phenomenon. Rather than seeing pastoral counseling as a contemporary expression of the tradition of the cure of souls, these writers contend that, because of its emphasis on the contribution of modern psychology and psychotherapy, contemporary pastoral counseling has lost sight of the religious dimension of the task. In contrast to pastoral counseling which has remained committed to the integration of psychology and theology, these writers maintain that all too often in the process of integration religion ends up being psychologized. They argue that by seeing psychotherapy and spiritual direction as complimentary processes, the uniqueness of spiritual

direction is maintained.

The fourth critique stated the problem in terms of the neglect of the spiritual dimension of human experience in pastoral care and counseling. It was suggested that the concept of spirit counterbalances the emphasis on psychological models in the field. While recognizing the contributions of modernity, some of its limitations were pointed out. It was argued that the central task of pastoral care today is the recovery of the spiritual dimension of human experience. In addition to incorporating insights from depth psychology, pastoral care and counseling needs a more adequate understanding of the human that includes the spiritual dimension.

This study has affirmed the contribution of modern psychology and psychotherapy to the field of pastoral counseling. It recognizes the importance of the task of integration, both in terms of critiquing the modern psychologies, as well being open to possible contributions from modern psychology and psychotherapy to theology.

This study has also stressed the role of theological and historical sources in pastoral counseling. It has been argued that what distinguishes pastoral counseling from other varieties of counseling is its theological core. Traditional Christian language and imagery are important sources in understanding this theological core. However, classical sources, such as the one used in this study, also need to be critiqued by contemporary disciplines.

The position represented here reaffirms the uniqueness and importance of the spiritual direction function in pastoral counseling without abandoning the therapeutic function. The therapeutic function is integrated into the larger theological container. Pastoral counseling is not just psychological guidance, but addresses the spiritual dimension in human experience as well. There is an increased need in society today for this kind of guidance as more and more people express an interest in spirituality and spiritual direction.

This study affirms the importance of the recovery of the spiritual dimension of human experience in contemporary pastoral counseling. It sees this happening within the pluralistic context of society today. The spiritual dimension is a fundamental category of human existence and is not limited to the Christian tradition. It has been argued that an adequate anthropology must address the spiritual dimension of human experience. However, the understanding of the human in this study is also informed by insights from depth psychology.

The thesis of this study is that the prayer of the heart is both a metaphor for the deepening movement of grace within the person and a model of spiritual formation. This dynamic of grace forms the theological core of the pastoral counseling process. From this perspective, pastoral counseling is seen as a process of spiritual formation.

The primary source for this study has been the



tradition of the prayer of the heart. It is one model of spiritual formation or deepening in grace. One of the goals of the study has been to see whether, by studying the prayer of the heart in depth, it can serve as a framework for understanding the pastoral counseling process as spiritual formation.

Depth psychology has been a secondary source for the study. It was chosen because it is another, more modern, model of deepening human experience. It has been argued that the prayer of the heart and depth psychology are particularly compatible because both provide ways in to human interiority.

One of the primary goals of the study has been to develop a theological understanding of the pastoral counseling process, to elucidate what distinguishes pastoral counseling from other forms of counseling. Another important goal of the study has been to reaffirm pastoral counseling's roots in the ancient tradition of the cure of souls without denying its more recent origins. A third goal has been to recover an understanding of the pastoral counseling process as spiritual formation. The position of this study is that the spiritual formation process includes psychological aspects. However, the understanding of the human here goes beyond modern depth psychology in asserting that the deepest part of the human being is not psychological but spiritual.

Chapter 2 introduced the prayer of the heart as a

method of inner prayer occupying a prominent place in the Eastern Christian tradition. It included an overview of the evolution of the prayer of the heart, highlighting some of the major stages in its development. There was also a discussion of the rationale underlying the selection of the primary text, *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart*, a classic in this tradition.

Chapter 3 contained a presentation of the central theological elements of the prayer of the heart, as well as a summary of the overall movement of the prayer. It is the position of this study that the overall movement of the prayer is one of deepening in grace. The prayer of the heart is both a metaphor for the process of deepening and a method for facilitating the process. It is a map of the life of prayer, a model of spiritual formation.

Chapter 4 explored the model of the prayer of the heart in more depth, suggesting ways in which it might contribute to developing a theological understanding of the pastoral counseling process. It concluded with the proposal for a theological container for the pastoral counseling process. It was suggested that the spiritual dimension of human experience is the dynamic of grace at the heart of the universe, the vertical dimension. The spiritual dimension is, thus, a fundamental category of human existence. It is present in all people, and it is an aspect of each pastoral counseling session. The deepening movement of grace provides a way in to the divine for all people, not just

Christians. This dynamic expresses the profound relationship between the depths of the human being and the depths of the divine.

### Criteria for a Model of Pastoral Counseling

This section summarizes some of the key elements of the understanding of the pastoral counseling process presented in this study. These elements serve as the basis for a set of criteria which can be used to evaluate theories of pastoral counseling and psychotherapy.

1. The true self as the image of God. One of the underlying assumptions of this study is that human beings are created in the divine image. The true self is seen as the image of God, the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. The spiritual core or heart of the human being is the potential for deepening in grace.

This understanding of the human has important implications for the pastoral counseling process. In the first place, it emphasizes the value of the client. The client's true self is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. The client is a gift of grace. Second, to the degree that divine grace is revealed in and through the pastoral counseling process, the process can be seen as sacramental.

2. Sin: the human condition. The essence of sin is seen as the denial of the true self, saying No! to the deepening movement of grace within one. The consequence of sin is a profound alienation. One is cut off from the depths of self and the depths of the divine. One is

powerless to save oneself.

The understanding of sin in this study recognizes both the depth of human woundedness and the depth of grace present in the client. Sin and grace coexist in the heart. The heart is a battlefield where the dynamic of grace comes into conflict with the forces of violence in the client. On the one hand, sin is persistent, the damage runs deep. On the other hand, grace is present in the depths even when the client is unaware of it.

3. The dynamic of grace. The core of this understanding of the pastoral counseling process is the notion of the dynamic of grace at the heart of the universe. Grace is an expression of the relational core of the universe, the divine Other who seeks human beings out, who desires to know human beings in their hearts, who is with human beings, and who invites human beings into relationship. It is this dynamic of grace at the heart of the universe that overcomes the profound alienation that lies at the core of the human condition.

4. A non-dualistic perspective. This dynamic of grace at the heart of the universe overcomes a number of critical dualisms. In the first place, there is no ultimate dualism between God and the world or God and the self. The path to the true self and the path to God are one and the same. Second, the dynamic of grace overcomes the conflict between the view of God as "out there" and the view of God as "in here." God is not "out there," distant, removed from human

affairs, impassive, unfeeling. Rather, God is "in here," intimate friend, lover, calling one ever more deeply into relationship. Third, the dynamic of grace overcomes a dualistic view of prayer where prayer is understood as an escape from the world rather than as a means of entrance into one's experience and into the outer world.

5. A formation process. At its core, pastoral counseling is a process of spiritual formation. The deepening movement of grace within the human being is the spiritual core of the pastoral counseling process. It is the ground of human growth and development. One of the central goals of the pastoral counseling process is to increase the client's responsiveness to grace. This is a process of divinization or sanctification. The Holy Spirit is seen as the ultimate source of human progress.

6. The element of asceticism. The role of asceticism in the prayer of the heart has important implications for this view of the pastoral counseling process. Human effort has been defined as consenting to the deepening movement of grace within one. However, human effort needs a container. Asceticism provides a structure or support for the spiritual formation process. It includes methods for deepening the religious life. People today are hungry for methods of deepening. Psychological methods of deepening human experience are integrated into this understanding of the pastoral counseling process. However, spiritual methods are given prominence.

7. A relational process. The pastoral counseling process is fundamentally a relational process. The model for the relationship between pastoral counselor and client is the notion of the Holy Spirit seeking one out in the depths of one's being. One of the roles of the pastoral counselor is to embody grace to the client. The relationship between the pastoral counselor and the client forms the container for the pastoral counseling process. This understanding of pastoral counseling emphasizes the need for a guide and companion, someone who knows the way, who has been there, and who also can accompany one. In this view, knowledge of the path signifies inner knowledge, not just knowledge about. It implies first hand experience of the dangers and the joys of the journey.

8. Experience as central. This view of the pastoral counseling process emphasizes the centrality of experience. One's experience serves as a lure, drawing one more deeply into one's self and the divine. The assumption is that underneath the process of being penetrated by bits and pieces of one's experience, God is offering one the promise of one's self back, healed and whole. The dynamic of grace takes one into one's experience. This is the vertical dimension. Prayer, or the pastoral counseling process, is the process of receiving one's primordial experience, of listening to the deepest thing in one.

9. Incarnation: assuming one's humanity. The pastoral counseling process is fundamentally a process of assuming

one's humanity, rather than denying it. This view assumes that wholeness or salvation is through the totality of one's experience, rather than through the rejection or denial of aspects of one's humanity. One assumes one's humanity through the process of learning how to be present to and suffer with one's self.

10. The attitude of compassion. The attitude of compassion is central to the pastoral counseling process. It conveys a sense of solidarity with one's self and with others. It signifies a willingness and ability to enter into one's own suffering and the suffering of others. One of the primary functions of the pastoral counselor is to feel with the client. Compassion requires facing one's own depths, containing and transforming one's own violence.

11. The principle of non-violence. One of the key elements in this approach is the principle of non-violence. It is based on the interpretation of spiritual warfare as the denial of denial. The pastoral counselor is a non-violent warrior. She or he is opposed to the forces of violence in the client. This perspective assumes that there is a connection between violence in the inner world and violence in the outer world. One of the important implications of this viewpoint is that pastoral counselors are called upon to take a stand against the forces of violence in the world.

12. The integration of the personality. One of the central goals of the pastoral counseling process is the

integration of the personality. It implies a liberation from the opposing forces within one, the forces of denial that oppose the deepening of grace. Integration occurs as an outcome of spiritual warfare. It implies a refusal to kill off parts of one's self in order to establish a false peace.

Integration involves the recovery of the true self, the image of God. The goal of the pastoral counseling process is a more spacious self, a self big enough to contain the opposing forces within one without having to split off or repress aspects of one's self. As a result of this process one is no longer divided internally. One's experience is available to one. One can be present to one's experiencing self.

Within this framework, the furnace of prayer is seen as the container for the integration process. As grace penetrates to the interior, more and more of one's inner conflicts are exposed. Warring aspects of the self come out into the open and are reconciled. One learns to stand the heat of grace, to hold at the center of one's self.

13. A non-defensive attitude. One of the goals of the pastoral counseling process is a transformation of the habitual attitude of the heart. It involves a shift from a defensive stance toward life, a hardening of one's heart against the deepening movement of grace, to a stance of consenting to grace and deepening. This stance of openness or continual consent to grace is the product of a lengthy



process of formation.

14. A balance between the way of affirmation and the way of negation. The pastoral counseling process is a way of affirmation. Salvation or wholeness lies through the assumption of the fullness of one's humanity. It is about incarnation. The pastoral counseling process is also a way of negation. One is continually being drawn out of the false self and deeper into the true self in God. This view affirms the importance of consent, surrender, being in the dark.

It has important implications for the pastoral counseling process. There is a place for working with images, such as images from dream, or drawing. There is also a place for being in the darkness, a time of letting go of images. The attitude is crucial. Being in the dark signifies an attitude of willingness, of letting go of controlling the deepening process.

15. Mind-in-heart. One of the key elements of the prayer of the heart is the notion of mind-in-heart prayer. What are the implications of this notion for the pastoral counseling process? Mind-in-heart prayer is a method of integration involving bringing one's awareness down from the head into the heart. As a result of this process one's awareness is deepened, one is increasingly present to one's primordial experience. There is no longer any separation between daily life and the depth dimension. Mind-in-heart prayer is the bridge. This is the integration of prayer

with life.

16. The spiritual dimension of human experience as self-transcendence. The spiritual dimension of the pastoral counseling process is understood as the deepening movement of grace within the person. It is the vertical dimension. The movement of deepening in grace is a movement of self-transcendence. The pastoral counseling process is a process of transfiguration, divinization or sanctification. It is the process of unwrapping the gift of the true self, uncovering the pearl of great price. One of the unique aspects of this understanding of human growth and development is that the process of self-transcendence is limitless. Spiritual formation takes a lifetime. Human beings are unfinished creatures.

The movement of self-transcendence, or deepening in grace, is at its core a movement of connection. The ultimate goal of the pastoral counseling process is an experience of union with God and creation. The dynamic of grace at the heart of the universe is what connects all of creation. The proper response to grace is the attitude of charity toward all creatures.

This has important implications for the pastoral counseling process. The dynamic of grace overcomes the experience of isolation that is so prevalent among clients. This sense of isolation is one of the deepest consequences of human woundedness. The experience of connection to the universe at one's core is ultimately what is healing.

Implications of the Study: The Pluralistic Context of  
Pastoral Counseling

It has been argued here that the ultimate container for the pastoral counseling process is theological. The theological core of the pastoral counseling process is the notion of the dynamic of grace at the heart of the universe. Pastoral counseling is viewed as a process of spiritual formation, deepening in grace. The spiritual dimension of human experience is this dynamic of grace. It is also termed the vertical dimension. The dynamic of grace is the bridge linking daily life and the depth dimension. What are some of the implications of this interpretation with regard to the pluralistic context of pastoral counseling?

Most pastoral counseling today occurs in a pluralistic context. The majority of clients, non-Christian as well as Christian, who seek counseling from a pastoral counselor, are primarily seeking psychotherapy. Some are attracted by the notion of pastoral counseling or Christian counseling as a place where they can trust that their religious values will be respected, that there will be no conflict between their Christian values and psychology. Many among this group express no need to talk about religious issues. They simply want reassurance that their values will be respected. However, for some clients, religious concerns come up during the course of the counseling process. How does the understanding of the pastoral counseling process presented here address these different perceptions of what pastoral

counseling is about?

What distinguishes pastoral counseling from other varieties of counseling is the theological container for the process. In this study this is understood as the dynamic of grace at the heart of the universe. The goal of pastoral counseling is to provide a container for and to facilitate the deepening movement of grace within the client. How can this goal be reconciled with the diversity of client expectations? Is it ever appropriate, or even important to make explicit use of religious language to talk about the process of deepening?

It is the position here that what is primary in the pastoral counseling process is deepening in grace. The focus of a pastoral counseling session, whether the client is a Christian or not, is on the seemingly secular content of the client's daily life. There is no need to use explicitly religious language with the client in order for deepening in grace to occur. The pastoral counselor can facilitate deepening without using explicitly religious language. One of the strengths of pastoral counseling as opposed to so-called Christian counseling is its inclusive stance. That is, the pastoral counselor respects the client's particular religious background--or lack of one--and accepts the client wherever he or she is. The pastoral counselor offers the client an experience of deepening in grace.

What distinguishes pastoral counseling from secular

psychotherapy? It is not the explicit content of the session. A session of pastoral counseling may resemble a session of psychotherapy to all outward appearances. Furthermore, pastoral counseling may not differ from psychotherapy with regard to the process of deepening in grace, either. The dynamic of grace is just as present in psychotherapy as it is in pastoral counseling. This assumption is based on the notion of the spiritual dimension of human experience as the vertical dimension that unites daily life and the depth dimension. In some instances, this dynamic of grace may be more present in a particular session of psychotherapy than in a particular session of pastoral counseling. Some secular psychotherapists may be more present to and able to facilitate the dynamic of grace than some pastoral counselors.

So, what distinguishes pastoral counseling from psychotherapy? One of the factors is the pastoral counselor's understanding of the process. The pastoral counselor sees the process as ultimately theological. Furthermore, the pastoral counselor has resources for understanding and facilitating the theological dimensions of the process. In this study, the theological core of the pastoral counseling process is understood as deepening in grace.

What, then, distinguishes pastoral counseling from Christian counseling? Generally, what is meant by Christian counseling includes an explicit focus on religious content.

Often this implies explicit use of Biblical material or religious language. Christian counseling often attempts to convert the non-Christian client. It takes a more exclusive position with regard to what is the truth and what is not.

From the perspective of this study, the process of deepening in grace is primary. The use of religious or biblical language is secondary and is only used when it facilitates the process of deepening in grace. It is the position here that using religious or biblical language in an exclusive way that does not accept the client where she or he is, does not facilitate deepening in grace. It is contrary to the principle of non-violence that is so important to this perspective.

What about the distinction between pastoral counseling and spiritual direction? Some distinguish pastoral counseling from spiritual direction by arguing that in spiritual direction the focus of the process is explicitly on the directee's prayer life. This is not the position of this study. It has been argued here that pastoral counseling has a spiritual direction function, containing and facilitating the process of deepening in grace, whether this is made explicit or not.

This discussion raises the problem of the use of religious language today. The situation in pastoral counseling reflects the situation in the liberal churches. The question is whether religious language can facilitate the process of deepening in grace. For many people today

religious language has lost its power to deepen their experience. This issue is one of the central challenges facing pastoral counseling today. It is the hope here that this study will make a contribution to the discussion.

### Contributions

One of the most important contributions of this study is a theological understanding of the pastoral counseling process. The theological understanding presented here is inclusive of insights from modern psychology and psychotherapy. However, this study contends that the theological container is bigger.

The second contribution of this study is its interpretation of the spiritual dimension of human experience as the deepening movement of grace within the person. This is the vertical dimension of existence, the incarnation of the dynamic of grace at the heart of the universe. It forms the spiritual core of the pastoral counseling process.

The understanding of the pastoral counseling process as spiritual formation is the third contribution of this study. Here, spiritual formation is seen as a process of deepening in grace. The prayer of the heart has provided one model for comprehending this process.

The fourth contribution of this study is in the area of a dialogue between Christian spirituality and depth psychology. It has been suggested that depth psychology and the prayer of the heart are both ways in to human

interiority. Each is a model of formation. Each has its methods of deepening human experience.

The fifth contribution of the study is its use of historical sources for developing a theological understanding of the pastoral counseling process. The primary source is a model of spiritual formation from the classical tradition. One of the reasons for going to the classical tradition has been the desire to affirm pastoral counseling as an expression of the ancient tradition of the cure of souls. However, this study has also affirmed pastoral counseling as a development of the liberal tradition in American Protestantism.

The sixth area in which this study makes a contribution is that it provides a model of spiritual formation that is compatible with the pluralistic context of contemporary pastoral counseling. The notion of the spiritual dimension as a fundamental category of human existence lays the foundation for a model of spiritual formation that is appropriate for all clients, Christians and non-Christians.

Finally, this study contributes to a dialogue between the sister disciplines of pastoral counseling and spiritual direction. It takes a step toward bridging the gap between what has largely been a Protestant movement and the Orthodox, Catholic, and Anglican traditions of spiritual direction.



### Limitations and Areas for Further Study

One of the major limitations of this study is the circle that has been drawn around the dialogue between the prayer of the heart and depth psychology. Because of the decision to focus on the prayer of the heart in depth, limitations of space meant that equal time could not be given to a treatment of depth psychology. One area for further discussion would be to focus more on the dialogue between the prayer of the heart and depth psychology, exploring the ways in which both are models of deepening human experience, ways into the depth dimension. This kind of study would highlight the similarities and differences between the models and the ways in which they compliment or contradict one another.

A second limitation and area for further study has to do with the concrete applications of this understanding of the pastoral counseling process. Clinical illustrations were used in this study, but they could be expanded upon. For example, how does one teach a method of deepening in an actual session of pastoral counseling?

A third area for further study would involve applying the criteria developed here to various models of psychotherapy. The position of this study is that depth psychology is the school of psychotherapy that is most compatible with the prayer of the heart. However, it was also suggested that this understanding of the pastoral counseling process could be used in conjunction with a

number of different psychotherapies.

A fourth area for further study would be to plumb the classical tradition of Christian spirituality for other models of spiritual formation that might contribute to a theological understanding of the pastoral counseling process. There is so much richness in this tradition. Oden is correct when he condemns prejudice against premodern sources of wisdom. Browning's observation concerning the lack of methods of deepening religious life comes to mind. There are numerous methods of deepening religious life to be found in the classical tradition. The tradition is enriched by a dialogue with contemporary sources, theological as well as psychological.

A fifth area for further study would be to investigate how this model, especially the notions of non-violence and assuming one's humanity, could contribute to a dialogue with theology, particularly in the area of critiquing some of the abusive, self-denying strands in traditional theology. In this respect, this study might find a companion in feminist theology.

A sixth area for further study might focus more on the implications of this understanding of the spiritual formation process for its impact on the outer world. What do the notions of deepening in grace, assuming one's humanity, non-violence, solidarity with others, creation as sacrament, and the dynamic of grace at the heart of the universe as the ground of connection, have to contribute?

The seventh area for further study centers on the problem of religious language and pastoral counseling. While remaining aware of the pluralistic context of pastoral counseling today and respectful of each client's particular religious background, the challenge for pastoral counselors is how to use explicitly religious language with clients in a way that facilitates deepening the process. Pastoral counselors are not alone in this challenge. One of the central dilemmas facing the liberal church today is how to relate the traditional language and symbols of the faith to daily life. Perhaps one of the ways forward would be for pastoral counselors to engage in a dialogue with theologians who are wrestling with this problem. Both sides could benefit from the exchange.

The final area for further study has to do with the implications of this study for the pastoral counselor's own prayer life. One of the distinguishing factors in the training of pastoral counselors is the emphasis on the pastoral counselor's personal therapy. The importance of doing one's own inner work has been affirmed in this study. Unless one has done one's own inner work, it is impossible to guide others on this journey. The pastoral counselor needs a big enough sense of self in order to contain the process. This spaciousness of self is only achieved by confronting the layers of one's own false self and allowing them to be stripped away so that more of one's experience is available to one. Becoming a pastoral counselor is a

formation process. However, so far within the field of pastoral counseling, this process has been primarily psychological. Without abandoning the psychological aspects of formation, the process could be greatly enhanced by complimenting psychological models of formation with models of formation drawn from the world's great spiritual traditions, including the prayer of the heart.

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